323 Erie St., PO Box 5015
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(810) 984-3881, sc4.edu

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PATTERNS

66TH EDITION

PATTERNS

66 EDITION 2024

WELCOME

As we skim through *Patterns* 66, we should first recognize that this magazine through the Pandemic, social turmoil, economic collapses as well as other challenges has endured longer than any other arts magazine at a college in Michigan. Since its inception, *Patterns* has served as a medium for our college's students to display their work and accomplishments. The magazine is a testimony to their dedication and willingness to commit time and energy to creating art.

Every edition is a collaboration between students, faculty, and staff. Though the early editions of the magazine may have been mimeographed or printed then folded and stapled together, every edition has a calendar that dictates every magazine's production. Over the years, the amount of time, skill, talent, and hard work has actually increased. One would think with computer software, the availability of tools such as powerful desktops, and design hardware that content could be assembled, laid out, and printed in a matter of days. In fact, the magazine still requires many hours of hard work. Moreover, the design team develops a theme, fonts, palette, and pages for the magazine. Our editorial team works with them to insure that the magazine meets the standards of an arts magazine. In all likelihood, the *Patterns* coordinators, facilitators, judges, faculty, and design team spend more time producing this edition than was spent for the first *Patterns*. And more of us are involved than ever before.

Like great food, putting together a great magazine takes care and attention. Creativity often moves at its own pace, which can result in pressure and lead to hectic weeks as the semester's own timeline spins forward rushing us toward the *Patterns* reception. Nevertheless, creativity is sometimes heightened by that pressure as well. As amazing as it might seem to those of us who have contributed to this magazine, we have organized our efforts, collaborated, and with our students produced the best magazine in the state over the last 66 years.

Before you, the reader, is a magazine that is the culmination of considerable effort, work, worry, and exhilaration. Spend a moment to admire its design, marvel at the artwork, and be moved by the literary works. All of us who have worked on this year's edition are proud to show you what we as a community of artists, writers, faculty, and staff can do. Enjoy!

THANK YOU

The following people have contributed to help make *Patterns* a celebrated event each year. Thank you to all of our judges, donors, and committee members. A special thank you to the SC4 Friends of the Arts; a committed group of businesses, community members and SC4 faculty and staff that support the arts at SC4, including music, theatre, creative writing and visual arts.

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AWARDS OF DISTINCTION

15 **Patrick Bourke Award:** Cass Gordon

17 **Eleanor Mathews Award:** Aldo Garcia-Pajaro

VISUAL ART

21 **First Place:** Rylee Pihaylic
Sluggish Decay, Digital Media

23 **Second Place:** Cass Gordon
Trust, Ceramic

25 **Third Place:** Dani Liebetreu
NEVERMORE, White Paint and Ink on Paper

POETRY

29 **Blanche Redman Award:** Spencer Regal
Message in a Bottle

31 **Second Place:** Aldo Garcia-Pajaro
Uprooted

33 **Third Place:** Roman Fritz
Continuity

ESSAY

63 **Kathleen Nickerson Award:** Kathryn Manhart
The Life of Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Reflection of Her Experiences through Alternate but Complementary Themes in "The Yellow Wallpaper"

75 **Second Place:** Anna Belle Favre
Supporting Women Through Poetry: An Analysis of Hozier's "Swan Upon Leda"

SHORT STORY

93 **Richard Colwell Award:** Aldo Garcia-Pajaro
Airport Winter

99 **Second Place:** Anna Belle Favre
Augusta

111 **Third Place:** Shelby Shirey
The Stain on The Wall

SELECTIONS OF MERIT

LITERARY SELECTIONS OF MERIT

35 Dani Liebetreu
Mirror, Poetry

37 Emily Brunk
Tulips in a Field, Poetry

39 Aldo Garcia-Pajaro
The Comforts of Ink, Poetry

40 Aldo Garcia-Pajaro
Styrofoam Fruit, Poetry

43 Kathryn Manhart
Lost, Not Found, Poetry

45 Dawson Whitcher
Sunflower Field, Poetry

47 Kayla Goodine
Lost and Found, Poetry

48 Anna Belle Favre
honey, Poetry

51 Anna Belle Favre
Connected, Poetry

52 Emilee Elliott
Bath Time, Poetry

54 Anna Belle Favre
Little Miss Perfect's Perfect Little Lines, Poetry

56 Chase Carnahan
A Haircut, Poetry

58 Laney Seppo
In These Four Walls, Poetry

83 Isabella Dominissini
Denial's Death, Essay

115 Emilee Elliott
Three Good Knocks, Short Story

VISUAL ART SELECTIONS OF MERIT

34 Spencer Regal
Freedom, But at What Cost, Mixed Media

36 Zoe Palmateer
Protector of the Forest, Digital Media

38 Josie Walker
Goalie Skate Texture, Pen & Ink

41 Josie Walker
Still Life in Conté , Conté Crayon

42 Anna Rieck
Asian Golden Cat Abstract, Digital Media

44 Cass Gordon
Befriending, Woodburning

46 Evelyn Scarbrough
Abduction (So Much for Stardust), Digital Media

49 Evelyn Scarbrough
Clinquant, Digital Media

50 Allison McGarvie
Sharp QT27, Pen & Ink

53 Emerald Anderson
House for Surrealist, Pen, Ink, Charcoal, & Graphite

57 Cass Gordon
Circular Flask, Ceramic

59 Jillian DeAnda
Architectural Study, Pen & Ink

67 Taylor-Rae Pastorius
Lady in the Lamp, Digital Media

69 Cass Gordon
Coal Miner, Mixed Media

70 Mitchie Taylor
The Bright Side, Digital Media

73 Cass Gordon
AI Dragon Pot, Ceramic

79 Allison McGarvie
Analogous Duality Self-Portrait, Colored Pencil

82 Reid Stoyan
Tacit Life, Charcoal

86 Alina Poplawski
Strawberry Lane, Digital Media

89 Zoe Palmateer
Chernobyl Disaster Infographic,
Digital + Accompanying Animation

97 Hailey Miller
Still Life in Conté, Conté Crayon

103 Cass Gordon
Spring, Ceramic

106 Morgan Thomas
The Woman in Red, Gouache, Pen, & Ink

109 Hailey Miller
A Few of My Favorite Things, Pen & Ink

113 Alina Poplawski
I Am Falling Apart, Digital Media

114 Hailey Miller
Stairway by the Water, Pen, Ink, & Charcoal

119 Evelyn Scarbrough
Ichor Moon, Digital Media

ELEANOR MATHEWS & PATRICK BOURKE AWARDS

Each year five special awards are given, named for past faculty members who made extraordinary contributions to the arts and literature on campus and to *Patterns* in particular. The Patrick Bourke and Eleanor Mathews Awards are awards of distinction that recognize students who have done exceptional work overall in art and literature.

The Blanche Redman, Richard Colwell, and Kathleen Nickerson Awards are given for the highest quality submissions for each year in poetry, fiction, and essay writing, respectively.

CASS GORDON

PATRICK BOURKE AWARD

The Patrick Bourke Award is presented to a student in art or design who has dedicated themselves to furthering their education in a visual arts field and has actively promoted art at St. Clair County Community College. This year, we're delighted to name Cass Gordon as the awardee.

Cass has been a longstanding participant in SC4's visual arts programming. Here, she has played a pivotal role in rejuvenating our post-pandemic visual art studios, most noticeably in ceramics. Her unwavering presence and dedication fueled a continuous creative cycle during a challenging period. Cass's quiet tenacity, combined with her eagerness to assist others created an inclusive environment for her fellow students. Her consistent output helped to motivate her peers to go above and beyond the required coursework. In addition to her guided studies, her independent pursuit of knowledge has also been a constant, even leading her to harvesting her own raw materials for use in the ceramic studio. Pursuing her work in both the 2D and 3D with excellence, Cass's impact on our arts community only continues to grow. Congratulations Cass on your well-deserved recognition!

ALDO GARCIA-PAJARO

ELEANOR MATHEWS AWARD

The exemplary student writer chosen for the Eleanor Mathews award has submitted work to *Patterns* that reflects achievement in more than one creative writing category. This year's award goes to the student writer Aldo Garcia-Pajaro whose work clearly reflects the criteria: "outstanding creativity, technical skill, and individual style." Aldo's voice is rich with an understanding of human nature. His works stand out as energetic, fresh, nuanced, and polished, reflecting a fictional and poetic world mature beyond his years.

"Airport Winter," a short story, investigates a day in the life of a man who has migrated with his wife and children from Mexico to the US. Despite or because of these efforts to make a better life, his choices have created more separation. Aldo's story displays a longing and need for home that transcends culture and circumstances, yet those motifs provide the work with both depth and light.

His poetry is beautiful as can be seen in this excerpt, which comes from his prose poem, "Uprooted":

> I recall the roots of the carnations that were placed in the ground when we were young, before deforestation when the world was not so hot. I toss and turn in bed waiting to be taken there, a haven where it is impossible to get scared by the steel fences, roaring iron rails, and concrete titans that we have known so long. Is it true that you used to think of this place too? Have you forgotten so easily like a dream after waking up? The Sun has yet to set on our fates; the clock's ticks and tocks may still be hushed away. I worry for you and these new horizons that you speak of despite not saying much at all these days.

Aldo Garcia-Pajaro' s writing rewards readers with warmth and wonder, and this year's edition of *Patterns* is enriched by what he has created for us.

VISUAL ARTS WINNERS

FIRST PLACE

VISUAL ARTS

RYLEE PIHAYLIC

SLUGGISH DECAY
BY RYLEE PIHAYLIC | DIGITAL MEDIA

VISUAL ARTS FIRST PLACE

SECOND PLACE

VISUAL ARTS

CASS GORDON

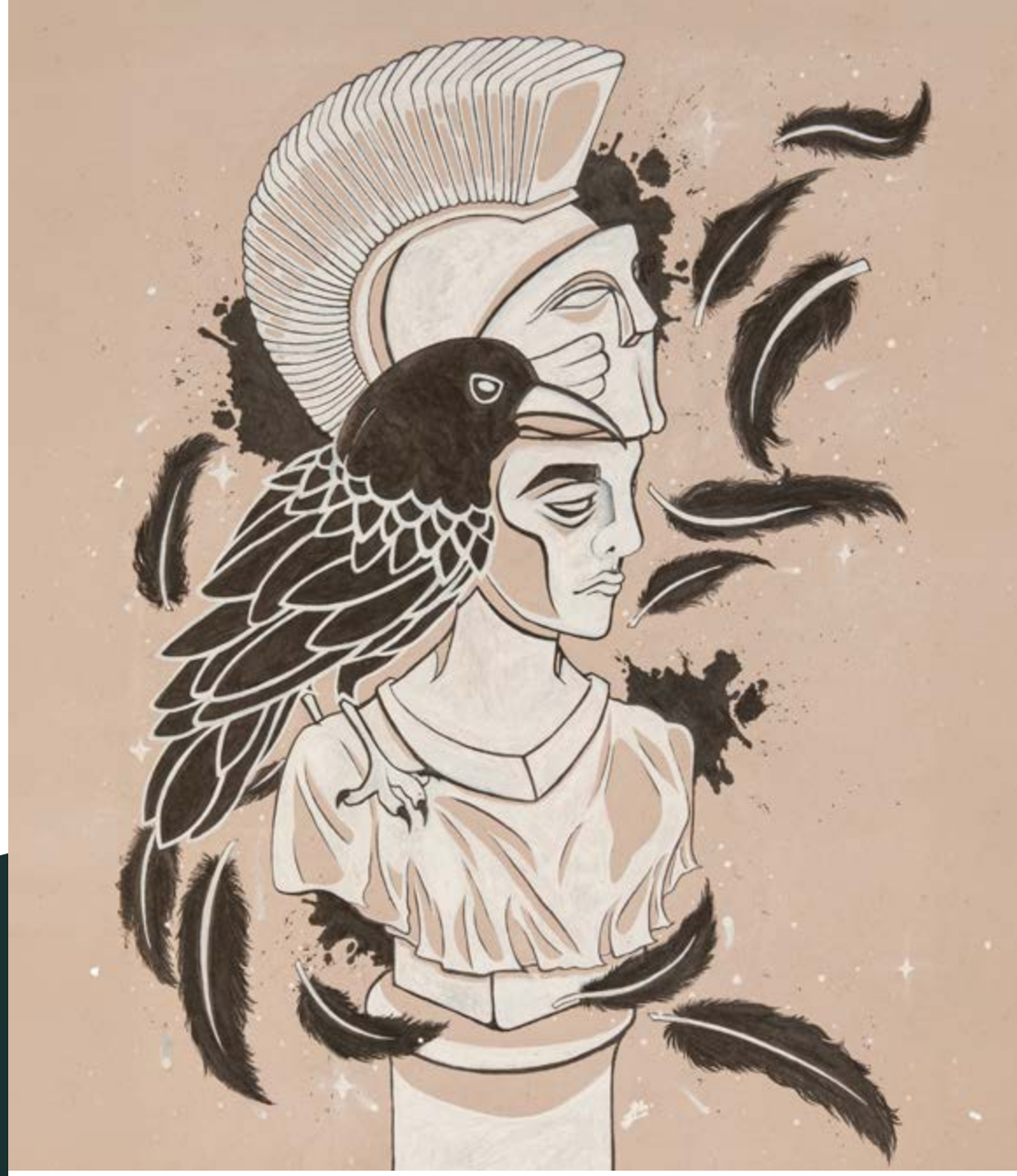
TRUST
BY CASS GORDON | CERAMIC

VISUAL ARTS SECOND PLACE

THIRD PLACE

VISUAL ARTS

DANI LIEBETREU



NEVERMORE

BY DANI LIEBETREU | WHITE PAINT & INK ON PAPER

VISUAL ARTS THIRD PLACE

POETRY SELECTIONS

FIRST PLACE

BLANCHE REDMAN AWARD

POETRY

SPENCER REGAL

MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

BY SPENCER REGAL

BLANCHE REDMAN AWARD • FIRST PLACE POETRY

To be loved is to be understood,
And for the longest time I have felt like a novel
Written in a dead language that few wish to learn,

When you plucked some words from my tongue,
I felt seen for the first time
Yet my language, an ocean's whisper,
Words pulled under by the restless tide—eluding your grasp

To be loved is to be understood,
And I have been mistranslated for as long as I can remember
A beautiful line rendered a string of words with no meaning,

I reach for my words and they turn to air,
A gust of wind is heard and a tornado is born from it
When I smile, you see barred teeth and a snarl,
My words taken out of context, seen as a threat instead of a plea

Lost in translation, lost to the sea

SECOND PLACE POETRY

ALDO GARCIA-PAJARO

UPROOTED

BY ALDO GARCIA-PAJARO

SECOND PLACE POETRY

There is this farm that I think of often, the one past the hill you used to tug at my shirt to roll down and to lie on. I recall the roots of the carnations that were placed in the ground when we were young, before deforestation when the world was not so hot. I toss and turn in bed waiting to be taken there, a haven where it is impossible to get scared by the steel fences, roaring iron rails, and concrete titans that we have known so long. Is it true that you used to think of this place too? Have you forgotten so easily like a dream after waking up? The Sun has yet to set on our fates; the clock's ticks and tocks may still be hushed away. I worry for you and these new horizons that you speak of despite not saying much at all these days. You are lost, as am I. We are not bound together, but we could be forever entwined like branches from separate pine trees hugging and twisting around each other to avoid growing up. This is my plea even if you refuse to read it. I will call at night for you; I do not care if you cannot hear it. At the very least, will you visit me? For what it is worth, in all of your blissfully vivid incarnations, even the ones you think dull, I have missed you. While I may not kiss you, I will always miss you.

THIRD PLACE POETRY

ROMAN FRITZ

CONTINUITY

BY ROMAN FRITZ

THIRD PLACE POETRY

Sometimes I feel
like I missed something crucial.

All the stories start the same:
like a fairy tale,
and its promised little "once upon a time".
I could never be myself—
I was trapped—
my whole façade, my life an act-

That was the stair I missed.
My brain replays that jolt a lot—
my stomach's drop as my foot plummets
through
the stair I thought was surely there.

Life's a checklist, right?
Tick off the boxes,
one
by
one,
until
you're done.
And I missed a box.
So mustn't that mean
it doesn't really count?

I never felt the pain they all describe,
the pain that all the stories start with.
I was never able to be me,
not in the times before.
The real me was trapped, locked away,
the dragon in a dress was my warden
and my mother had thrown out the key—
I was always me.

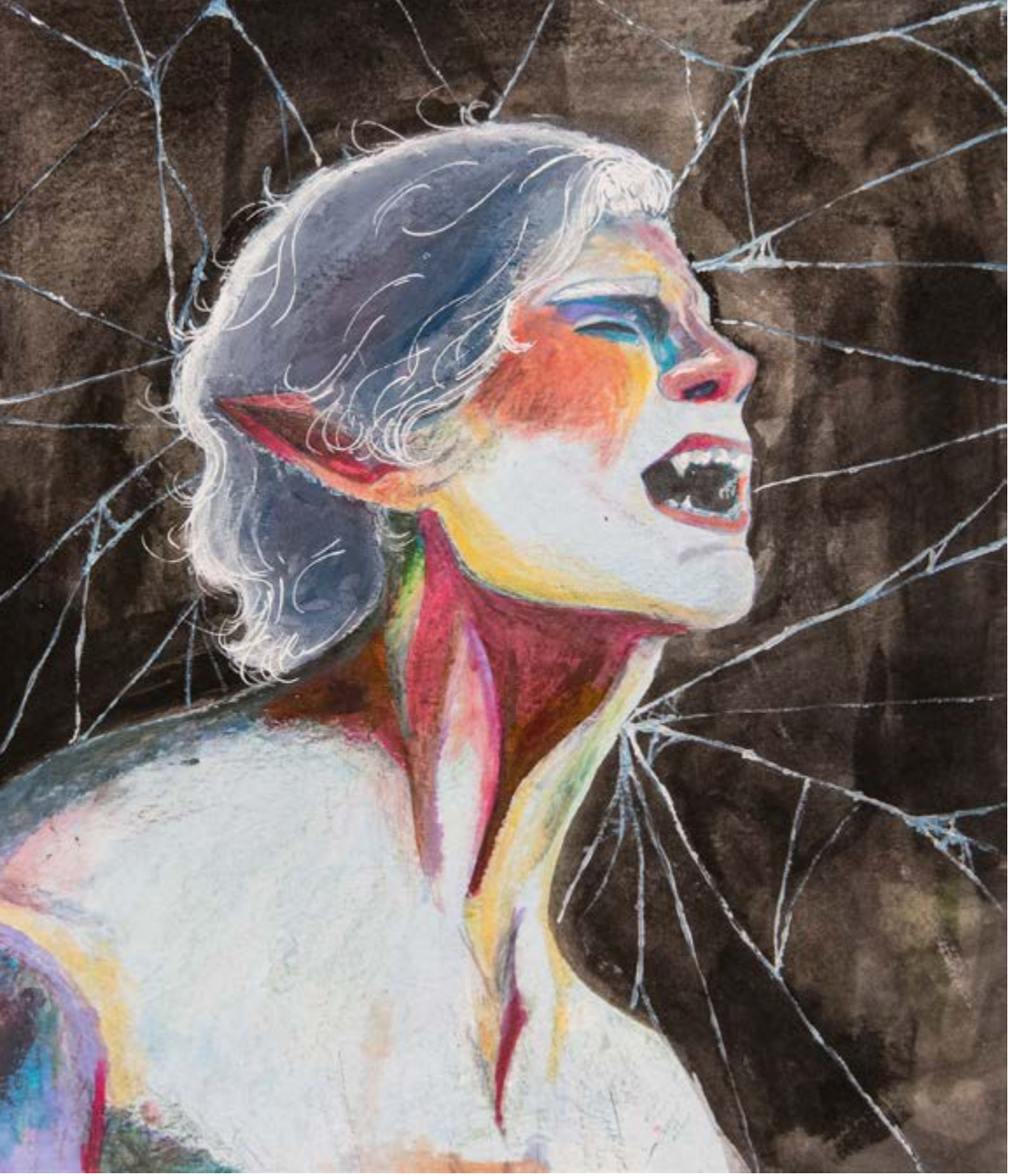
I'm sorry you weren't—
but somehow, I was.
The skirt didn't change my identity.
Barrettes didn't lock me away.

I am and always have been me.
Does getting a haircut change the
self?
Does a pair of shoes define the ego?
No, you said,
that's laughable.
Clothes don't make a person.

So why should they make me?
I'm the same I've always been.
So what if I tried on new pronouns?
I liked how they went with my shirt.
My name matched my hair dye.
Looking in the mirror
made me smile,
because all my clothes finally fit.

So maybe I never missed anything.
I'm still the same me that I always
was.

I just smile at the person
in the store windows, now.
I like his style.
He's got cool clothes.



FREEDOM, BUT AT WHAT COST
BY SPENCER REGAL | MIXED MEDIA

VISUAL ARTS SELECTION OF MERIT

MIRROR
BY DANI LIEBETREU

POETRY SELECTION OF MERIT

She calls to me at night. I see her. In the mirror. I see her but I don't remember her face. She leaves the moment I look at her. The only thing I remember is that smile. She smiles at me. Then laughs as she leaves. Every. Time. I want to see her, but she slithers away without a sound. I have to see her no matter the cost. My family thinks I'm crazy. But that doesn't matter. When I see her, I'll laugh at their foolishness. Sitting on the edge of my bed, I stare at the mirror. In the dead of night. She likes it better at night. I don't know why. Maybe she likes the moonlight. My mom tells me a good night's rest will do me good, but she will watch me. She likes watching me sleep. I tried pretending to sleep, but she knows. I stare. She doesn't come. Why can I never see you? I stare. She doesn't come. My eyes stop blinking. I stare. She doesn't come. A tear fell down my face. I stare. She doesn't come. For what purpose do you torture me so I said. I stare— She doesn't come. I turn away from the mirror to my window. The moonlight enters my room. I like the moonlight. I like the night. It's better than daytime. I turn to the mirror. She was there with a smile. I saw her for a moment. And I smiled. She was gone again. But instead of her I saw my bed. I saw myself on the edge of my bed. My reflection turned to the mirror. She was crying. She spoke with a whimpering voice. She said— For what purpose do you torture me so. I smile. And I laugh.

PROTECTOR OF THE FOREST
BY ZOE PALMATEER | DIGITAL MEDIA

VISUAL ARTS SELECTION OF MERIT

TULIPS IN A FIELD
BY EMILY BRUNK

POETRY SELECTION OF MERIT

The sweet scent of spring twisted and twirled in the April breeze.
The morning shower trickled from tulip petals,
watering the soil beneath.
The scent of fresh earth fills the lungs of passersby.
Vibrant shades of pink, purple, and white lined the fields.
Fluttering monarchs and bumblebees danced from one petal to another.
What a sight! What a sight!
A tiny spider sat on its web watching, waiting,
Soon it will be time but not yet.
Buzz, Buzz, Buzz,
An unknowing victim flew right into its trap.
Is this the scene of a perfect spring day?
Perhaps.

A wall of darkness rolls in,
The field becomes still.
A distant siren fills the empty air.
A spiraling funnel barrels toward the tulips.
Its black eyes and wicked breath cause trees to collapse.
No one can outmaneuver her or escape.
She comes for all and leaves nothing behind,
Nothing is safe from her wrath,
Not even tulips on a perfect spring day.

GOALIE SKATE TEXTURE
BY JOSIE WALKER | PEN & INK

VISUAL ARTS SELECTION OF MERIT

THE COMFORTS OF INK
BY ALDO GARCIA-PAJARO

POETRY SELECTION OF MERIT

Ink runs from the corners of my mouth. There is no happiness like mine.
—Mark Strand, "Eating Poetry"

People want to see so many faces,
to hear such pretty voices on this earth
Meanwhile I sleep soundly on papyrus,
My dreams are boundless, this body unhurt,
I am but one man with two hands, no less,
but I can reach nature with endless words
Luxury comforts you, ink does the same,
Worms sing to me, weeds grow above my casket,
all minute beauties share their nicknames,
their closely guarded jokes with me, secrets
I was born with a long name one bright morn,
Now buried under a long epitaph,
in blackest night, in the darkest rainstorm
I jest, cry and rest with this epigraph

STYROFOAM FRUIT
BY ALDO GARCIA-PAJARO

POETRY SELECTION OF MERIT

The gates were blown open, but I was uninvited
to pick from the styrofoam garden of fruit

What seeds have been sewn from what little has ripened
My tongue bleeds for a taste much too cruel, styrofoam fruit

Unable to rot, presumably sprouting for naught,
not at all good to consume styrofoam as if it were fruit

I see this, I know of many things falsely taught
Memories of Chris or falling for a styrofoam fruit

Plastic wings and artificial things, mere mortal men
cannot tell the difference between styrofoam and fruit

Craving the core, standing on the outside just when
Daylight dims, offering that shimmering styrofoam fruit

But I must warn my friends, neighbors, at sunrise
not to bite when they find the styrofoam fruit

My tight fists clenched and red, eyes fixed on our blue sky
Hoping to hide what I've swiped: this styrofoam fruit

Sealing my fate, stealing like a heathen, I am done
beseeching the wait, so I reached for you, styrofoam fruit

No rhyme nor reason, all lies in treason
I have picked my poison, my styrofoam fruit

STILL LIFE IN CONTÉ
BY JOSIE WALKER | CONTÉ CRAYON

VISUAL ARTS SELECTION OF MERIT

ASIAN GOLDEN CAT ABSTRACT
BY ANNA RIECK | DIGITAL MEDIA

VISUAL ARTS SELECTION OF MERIT

LOST, NOT FOUND
BY KATHRYN MANHART

POETRY SELECTION OF MERIT

Things are lost
As time slowly consumes
The one life I was given.
One day I will be no more.

My time is only borrowed
And the details become inconsequential.
The mistakes add up like
A pile of dirty laundry.

My childhood: once there now gone;
A toy lost at the grocery store.
Ignorance: what was not realized could not yield pain;
A hairband I didn't know I lost.

The chance to watch a meteor shower,
A book I gave away and never got back.
I didn't cherish our cats when we had them
And I probably lost some socks.

Some possessions, like my phone
Or my glasses, I lost
But found again. Those belongings
Must just be too important
To lose.

An old toy
Or a hairband,
I guess those were fine to go.
But what about my childhood
And my cats?

They were important too,
But once a moment has passed
It won't ever come back.

BEFRIENDING
BY CASS GORDON | WOODBURNING

VISUAL ARTS SELECTION OF MERIT

SUNFLOWER FIELD
BY DAWSON WHITCHER

POETRY SELECTION OF MERIT

In the field,
The golden petals tower over him,
Like the sun,
As it rises,
Over the horizon,
His vibrant blue shirt,
Pokes,
Through the greenery,
Of the endless province
Of sunflowers
The leaves
Act as a blanket,
To hide the rest of his body,
From the frame,
Of the camera,
The clouds,
Conceal the sun,
From the blonde flowers,
Forcing them to look down,
Towards the radiant smile,
Of the younger brother,
As if they were someone
Searching for the thing
That brings
Happiness

ABDUCTION (SO MUCH FOR STARDUST)
BY EVELYN SCARBROUGH | DIGITAL MEDIA

VISUAL ARTS SELECTION OF MERIT

LOST AND FOUND
BY KAYLA GOODINE

POETRY SELECTION OF MERIT

In Life's garden,
blooming flowers eventually wilt.
Friends fade,
like the box dye in my hair.
Pets and their panting will echo in the empty halls of my mind.
A father's motionless shadow,
a mother's selfishness blinding her like fog on a backroad.
So many homes, the same deceiving hearts.
The love of family never given without the heavy toll of obedience and fear.
Just as the fluctuating temperatures erode the earth,
these memories erode my mind.
But the goodness of it all has not been entirely lost.
Laughter will still be heard from the playground back at primary school,
whether that be from the children there, or from the child I once was.
These memories linger within my soul, cast a shadow upon my heart.
I will crave what I've lost to time, a cruel creature. A yearning for these memories will forever
remain, as I fight myself not to chase after them.
I will stand still with the weight of hopes that were too high and the tears of the little girl who resides
within me.
I take it one slow day after the next, hoping that this cloak of burdens and self-pity will wash away,
leaving a bud on the brink of bloom in its absence.

honey

BY ANNA BELLE FAVRE

POETRY SELECTION OF MERIT

honey is more than just a pet name;
honey is my love for you;
honey is slow and sweet;
honey is warm and quiet;

with a glance of a touch, it grabs on to you,
and it doesn't let go.
it's a pleasant fight,
a warm captivity,
and i feel safe with this viscous coating.

honey is long-lasting;
honey doesn't expire;
when it’s crystalized and grainy,
a soft, warm touch
resumes it to its gooey, lazy, steady self.

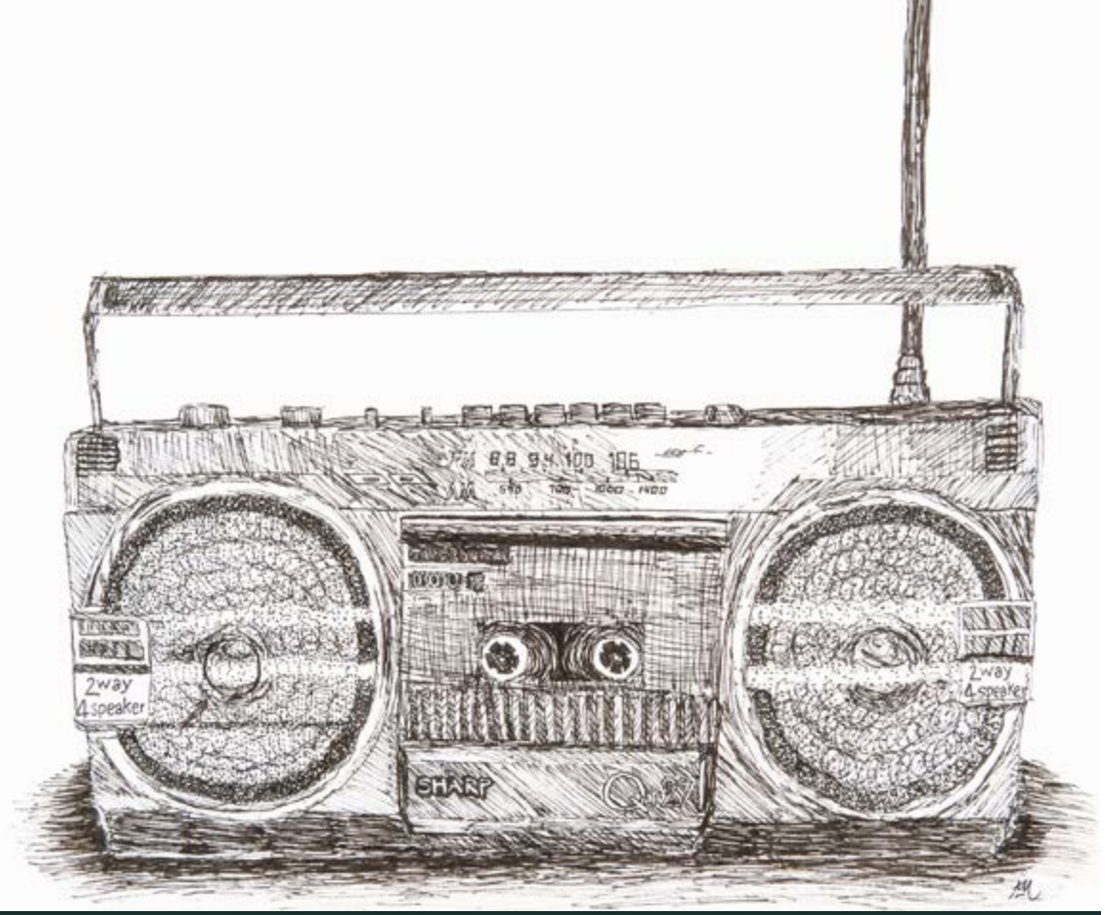
and so, my honey;
you are safe and sugary and nice;
when i’m feeling slow,
like the pouring of this liquid gold,
i tack a few y's on the end;

you,
my honey
y
y
y
y.

CLINQUANT

BY EVELYN SCARBROUGH | DIGITAL MEDIA

VISUAL ARTS SELECTION OF MERIT



SHARP QT27
BY ALLISON MCGARVIE | PEN & INK

VISUAL ARTS SELECTION OF MERIT

CONNECTED
BY ANNA BELLE FAVRE

POETRY SELECTION OF MERIT

I walk into the library to study by myself.
My boots squeak as I walk to the stiff chair and take a seat.
I notice the girl in front of me has the same headphones as I do.
I put mine on carefully so they won't pinch the tops of my ears.
As I start to study, I ignore a message from the one I'm supposed to love.
I keep writing, in my own little bubble.
In the stories I draw up, I don’t have to think about him.
I don’t have to worry about him.
I let the clacking of keys take me away into the world of poetry I imagine.

My bubble of concentration pops when a boy our age walks in.
He has wired earbuds in, and walks up to the girl with the headphones.
Her face lights up as soon as she notices him.
Her cheeks shimmer and blush.
She takes off her headphones and hands him her drink.
He takes a sip without ever taking his eyes off of his flame.
He stands close, while his hand gently rubs her back.

The way they move is so comfortable, not actually showing much affection,
but simply being close, and letting the air between them flower with their love.
I can feel the blossoming emotion radiating off of them:
a warm appreciation and desire.
He passes her one earbud, keeping the other in his ear,
and they listen together.
They tilt their chairs to chat and giggle for a while,
and then he takes back his earbud
and gets up to leave.
He squeezes her shoulder, plants a kiss on her head,
and walks out while she puts her headphones back on.
He had come by just to say hi, just to connect.

Their comfortable romance makes my heart swell and then break as my cell buzzes.
Words on my screen cancel our date,
without the intimacy of conversation,
or the warmth of a familiar voice,
it’s over.

BATH TIME

BY EMILEE ELLIOTT

POETRY SELECTION OF MERIT

Lavender bubbles permeate the air

Laughter sloshes over the tub, drenching everything in its wake

Foam letters, crinkled and bright, stuck haphazardly upon the tiles,

Much like the cowlick of hair plastered proudly

Far too many ships, star fish, octopuses are piled into the ever-shrinking tub

Nothing here is tidy, rather just right.

A vigorous, exhausting effort to wash away our day

we both emerge from the tub refreshed

One wrapped in a fuzzy towel

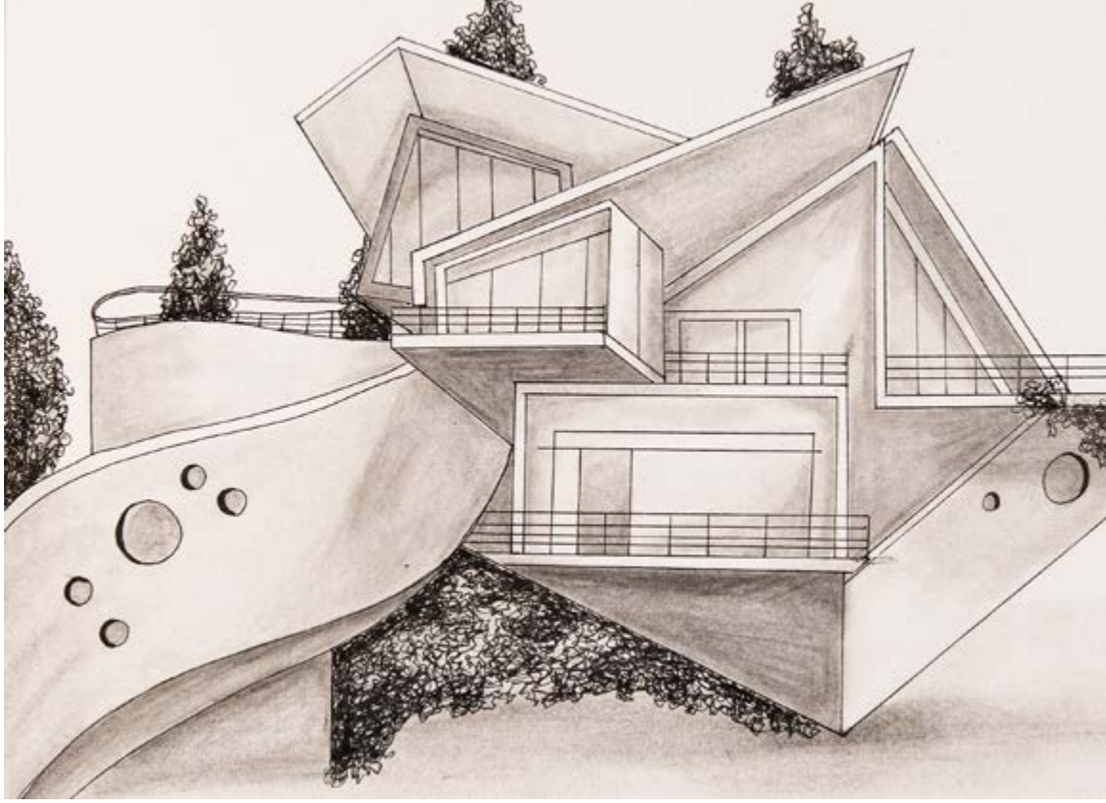
One drenched head to toe

Sleepily ready to embrace the night's beginnings,

Another night's battle of blankets, stuffies, and lots of stories of trucks, planes and trains

It's just one stage after all,

Hectic, tiring, but full of love.



HOUSE FOR SURREALIST

BY EMERALD ANDERSON | PEN, INK, CHARCOAL, & GRAPHITE

VISUAL ARTS SELECTION OF MERIT

LITTLE MISS PERFECT'S PERFECT LITTLE LINES

BY ANNA BELLE FAVRE

POETRY SELECTION OF MERIT

Good morning sweetie,
how's our little superstar?
big day ahead, you better work hard;

go to class,
get all A's,
answer every question;
but raise your hand,
wait your turn;
you best not interrupt;

be well-mannered;
respect your elders,
respect your teachers,
respect your classmates,
respect your surroundings,
act as though you respect yourself;

learn another language,
learn two languages,
play an instrument, or two, or five,
never miss a day of school,
never show up late,
never give anything less than your absolute best effort,
join a club,
join two clubs,
join every club,
you need to represent our youth,
our flawless angel needs to lead by example;

you're the face of this family;
you're the face of this school;
you're the face of this town;
you're the face of this generation;
keep working hard, and you will be the face of this country;

dress your best;
achieve your best;
be your best;
show your best;
be perfect;

when you cry, excuse yourself to the bathroom;
nobody can know your pain;
ladies don't cry over silly matters;
you're the perfect girl,
you don't hurt,
you don't cry,
you're very kind,
you're very smart,
you're very compassionate,
you're very empathetic,
and you're, from what they can tell, truly lovely;

but you're not lovely, are you?
lovely girls can handle the pressure;

But tally after tally,
score after score,
mark after mark,
you released that pressure;

for days, weeks, months, and years,
you made these tattoos a habit;

you need to be perfect,
but instead, you took a beautiful, shining blade,
one as sharp and as bright as we once thought you were,
and you sliced hundreds of perfect little lines to reveal your imperfection;
your inadequacy leaked out, creeping down your skin:
a crimson reminder that whispers your failures flows from each wound;

one perfect line for every way you disappointed us;
you disrespected your elders,
disrespected your teachers,
disrespected your classmates,
disrespected your surroundings,
and you have disrespected yourself;

stop that nonsense and get better;
here is how a proper lady thinks and acts;
here is how to cover a gash with makeup;
here is how to avoid wandering eyes;
here is how to keep your weaknesses secret;
it's what you have to do;
it's what we all do;

do better, sweetie.

A HAIRCUT
BY CHASE CARNAHAN

POETRY SELECTION OF MERIT

Hairspray doubled as perfume.
Her baggy black t-shirt.
My 1960s am radio sounding hair.
She only slightly trims like well-kept grass.
Pennies lounged in the fountain,
Splashes in a wish's purse.
Rareness, the passing of a roadster.
Our lights reflect upon the chrome frame,
Giving back colors of a soccer ball.
Besides the rainbow in shampoo,
Bubbles sparkled like little sponge cakes.
My cowboy boots tucked beneath jeans,
Like a Clint Eastwood flick.
Her eye for the fantastic.
She gets me ready for my scenes.
The ones I star in every day.

CIRCULAR FLASK
BY CASS GORDON | CERAMIC

VISUAL ARTS SELECTION OF MERIT

IN THESE FOUR WALLS

BY LANEY SEPPO

POETRY SELECTION OF MERIT

I've never had my own room. I've had a bed and a dresser designated in one corner, among other beds and dressers designated in another corner, since the day I was born. The blue birds singing songs along my wall were never mine alone, even if I was the only one who wished them goodnight. The creaky floorboards that whispered to one another in the dead of night did not just make my heart flutter, even if I was the only one who told them to be quiet. Staring out of the window that widened my sense of the world—that encapsulated the infinite human beings playing at the park or watching a baseball game—was not just my favorite pastime, even if I was the only one who sung out to those who could hear me from afar. I've never had my own room. I've had four walls containing three different seasons of life. Fall, winter, spring—never summer. I've had a box lined with funhouse mirrors that plastered my small chest, bumpy thighs, and soft stomach to my sisters who could exchange pants, who could fill a V-neck with something greater in the alphabet than the letter A, who didn't hide behind the door when getting dressed because they had nothing to hide, no curve or swell out of place. I've never had my own room. I've had walls, ceilings, floors that told my greatest secrets if I dared to enter the threshold alone, seeking comfort in a place that would hold its breath if I lingered too long. Muffled cries, whispered lullabies, never dried eyes. Tight smiles, forced laughs, pretend similarities. I would dream of a room that was mine. A room that contained only the mess I created, a room where decorations exclaimed who I was as a whole not just one-third of me. I dreamed of a room that welcomed me instead of rejecting me, a room that didn't push me away. I should have dreamed of more time instead, savored the chaos a little longer, appreciated having my sisters near and available instead of having to wait for a call back. For no one ever told me that when you have your own room, the silence is unbearable, the loudest reminder that only now are you truly forlorn.

ARCHITECTURAL STUDY

BY JILLIAN DEANDA | PEN & INK

VISUAL ARTS SELECTION OF MERIT

ESSAY SELECTIONS

FIRST PLACE

KATHLEEN NICKERSON AWARD ESSAY

KATHRYN MANHART

THE LIFE OF CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN AND THE REFLECTION OF HER EXPERIENCES THROUGH ALTERNATE BUT COMPLEMENTARY THEMES IN "THE YELLOW WALLPAPER"

BY KATHRYN MANHART

KATHLEEN NICKERSON AWARD • FIRST PLACE ESSAY

Charlotte Perkins Gilman was a notable American author who lived from July 3, 1860 to August 17, 1935. One of her most famous works is a short story titled "The Yellow Wallpaper". Written in 1890 and published in 1892, it is the controversial story of a young woman struggling with mental illness and a treatment known as the rest cure. The story is fictional, but it is a reproduction of Gilman's experiences. She herself was depressed and was treated by the renowned doctor Weir Mitchell who prescribed to her the rest cure. The rest cure was used at the time to treat depressed people and involved doing as little physical or intellectual activity as possible. Following the rest cure nearly drove Gilman crazy, and she eventually went against the doctor's orders and began writing again. Out of this came "The Yellow Wallpaper". While "The Yellow Wallpaper" is widely regarded as an altered retelling of Gilman's experience with Mitchell and the rest cure, many critics have also come to see it as a commentary on how women in Gilman's day were trapped in their domestic lives in society. This second interpretation is further supported by Gilman's other ventures in and novels on feminism. "The Yellow Wallpaper" tells the story of a woman trapped both by domestic life and by mental illness and ineffective treatment. The woman in the story is a reflection of Gilman, and the woman's struggles reflect Gilman's own. Together, the two alternate themes complement each other and embody an overall idea of being imprisoned within one's own life. This imprisonment is presented specifically through Gilman's own personal experiences. Lastly, Gilman's experiences, reflected in her short story, can help us to understand some of today's issues (namely inappropriate treatment of mental problems and unequal treatment of women) so that we can work to successfully resolve them.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman was born on July 3, 1860 and passed away on August 17, 1935. According to an overview of Gilman by Deborah Evans, Gilman did not have much contact with her father. After he left the family when Gilman was a child, her mother struggled with raising Gilman and her

sibling and had little meaningful contact with the children. After education, Gilman worked as an artist and a governess. She did not intend to marry, at least not until she met fellow artist Charles Walter Stetson. She married him at age 24, and less than a year later, their daughter Katherine was born. Gilman had already been stressed by the role she had been expected to play in relation to her husband, but once her daughter was born this stress became too much, and she developed depression (Evans).

Gilman shared her struggles with depression and later her treatment in a piece titled "Why I Wrote 'The Yellow Wallpaper'?" she explained that "For many years [she] suffered from a severe and continuous nervous breakdown tending to melancholia--and beyond. During about the third year of this trouble [she] went, in devout faith and some faint stir of hope, to a noted specialist in nervous diseases, the best known in the country". This "noted specialist in nervous diseases," known as Weir Mitchell, diagnosed Gilman as having "neurasthenia," or "a breakdown of the nervous system" (Golden). He applied a treatment to Gilman known as the rest cure. The treatment would have the patient spending a lot of time simply resting in bed, experiencing limited physical and intellectual activity. Mitchell's rest cure was supposed to "heal the mind by healing the body," and thus "attended to the physical symptoms of depression" (Golden). According to Golden, Mitchell treated many other famous figures besides Gilman, including Walt Whitman, Jane Addams, and others. Some of these people responded positively to his treatment, and others did not – like Gilman.

Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" reflects the author's depression and treatment. An unnamed protagonist has come with her husband/physician (aptly named John) to a new house where they will stay for a while; it will hopefully help to cure her "neurasthenia." She does not believe that the treatment (the rest cure) is working and thinks that some activity will do her good. She often writes in a diary that she keeps hidden from John. She writes, "There comes John, and I must put this away—he hates to have me write a word" (Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper"). She hides it from John as he is a physician and thinks that the rest cure (and not writing) will help her. She is forced to stay in a room with an ugly yellow wallpaper on the walls, and with windows "barred for little children, and there are rings and things in the walls," as it appears to once have been a nursery (Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper"). Overtime she begins to see patterns in the wallpaper and imagines a woman creeping around, trapped behind that wallpaper. Her mental health falls into a downward spiral, and eventually she sees herself as the woman trapped behind the wallpaper.

She rips away the wallpaper and "frees" herself, and when her husband comes in and faints at what he sees, she simply "creeps" over him.

The ending of the story can be connected to Gilman's departure from the rest cure. After about three months of the treatment, she just could not take it anymore. The rest cure had only been making her feel worse. As with the woman who tore away the wallpaper, Gilman rejected her detrimental treatment. She was a writer and an artist, and she did not want to be the perfect domestic wife expected in her time. According to Gilman in "Why I Wrote 'The Yellow Wallpaper'?", "helped by a wise friend," she went to work again and produced her famous short story, "The Yellow Wallpaper." She based it on her experience with depression and the rest cure, and so sent it to Weir Mitchell, in hopes that he would change his ways. "He never acknowledged it," Gilman wrote, but was pleased when she was told, "the great specialist had admitted to friends of his that he had altered his treatment of neurasthenia since reading 'The Yellow Wallpaper' (Gilman, "Why I Wrote 'The Yellow Wallpaper'?"). When Gilman overcame her adversary (the treatment and the doctor), there was nothing anyone could do about it. This emancipation is reflected in the woman in "The Yellow Wallpaper" tearing away her prison (the wallpaper), and even "creeping" over her fallen husband (who is also a physician).

Gilman was constrained both by the treatment of her mental health and by the role she was expected to play in society. One interpretation of "The Yellow Wallpaper" is that the story presents mental health and treatment gone wrong, specifically through Gilman's eyes. The protagonist has a similar condition to Gilman's, and she has been prescribed the rest cure. Her doctor is not Weir Mitchell in the story, but Mitchell is mentioned as another doctor that the protagonist is scared to go to:

> John says if I don't pick up faster he shall send me to Weir Mitchell in the fall.
>
> But I don't want to go there at all. I had a friend who was in his hands once, and she says he is just like John and my brother, only more so! (Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper")

In addition, the protagonist has a baby in the story, though it is taken care of by a nursemaid, Mary, and not by its mother. This is because of the protagonist's mental illness and incapability of taking care of a child, like the situation Gilman had with her own child:

> Nobody would believe what an effort it is to do what little I am able—to dress and entertain, and order things.

> It is fortunate Mary is so good with the baby. Such a dear baby!
> (Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper")

The creeping woman behind the wallpaper represents the narrator better than Gilman, but is still, in the end, an image based on Gilman and her experiences. Both Gilman and her protagonist were trapped by the rest cure, their depression seemingly hidden, just as the woman hidden within the wallpaper: "I didn't realize for a long time what the thing was that showed behind, that dim sub-pattern, but now I am quite sure it is a woman," the narrator of the story writes (Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper"). In the end the protagonist spirals into insanity, her mental problems unveiled, just as the wallpaper is ripped away, freeing the woman. She even feels like she is the woman: "I've got out at last," said I, "in spite of you and Jane. And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!" (Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper"). However, Gilman never fell that far. She managed to find comfort in her writing.

While "The Yellow Wallpaper" can be considered a depiction of Gilman's experience with the rest cure, it can also be interpreted as a portrait of a woman's conflict with the strains of the domestic life, especially the domestic life expected of a woman in Gilman's era. Again, the situation is seen from Gilman's eyes. Gilman apparently experienced a "wild unrest," or a war between two selves within her (Horowitz). In a private, untitled poem, she described that conflict:

> Can I, who suffer from the wild unrest
> Of two strong natures claiming each its due,
> And can not tell the greater of the two;
> Who have two spirits ruling in my breast
> Alternately, and know not which is guest
> And which the owner true.

In "Wild Unrest: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Making of 'The Yellow Wall-Paper'" Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz identifies these two selves as "One, her female side, desired a man's love and its full expression in marriage and children. The other, the self that in her mind had no sex, felt the need to be independent to act in the world—to write, convince others of her ideas, and become famous." Horowitz then asks, "Which of her spirits was the true 'owner' of Charlotte? Which was the 'guest'?"

Indeed, Gilman had a conflict between these two selves. Her mental illness had even seemed to arise from it. According to Evans' overview, she had first become stressed at the inequality of her role as wife

LADY IN THE LAMP
BY TAYLOR-RAE PASTORIUS | DIGITAL MEDIA

VISUAL ARTS SELECTION OF MERIT

to Stetson's role as husband. This conflict was pushed over the edge with the birth of her daughter, as she was forced even further into being no more than a wife and a mother, a person in charge of nothing but domestic affairs (Evans). At this point, she developed her mental condition. She became "depressed, spiritless, weak, and hysterical" (Golden).

With that information in mind, "The Yellow Wallpaper" can be seen as recreating Gilman's experience as a woman trapped in her role in society. Throughout the story, the protagonist does not get to make any decisions for herself; they are instead left to her husband. For example, when writing of the room with "The Yellow Wallpaper," she writes, "I don't like our room one bit. I wanted one downstairs that opened onto the piazza and had roses all over the window, and such pretty old-fashioned chintz hangings! But John would not hear of it" (Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper"). She does not even get to choose her own room. In addition to that, her room has barred windows and other tools of imprisonment. She is trapped in her role as a wife, in the same way Gilman was.

This interpretation of "The Yellow Wallpaper" can also be seen symbolically within the wallpaper itself. The creeping woman is trapped behind the wallpaper, in that room that John has chosen for the narrator, and she is hidden within the wallpaper. John continually reassures his wife that she is not really that sick and does not believe that she is really being serious. She is almost forced to hide her problems, just as the woman within the wallpaper is hidden. However, in the end, the narrator tears away the wallpaper and frees herself. After tearing away the wallpaper, the protagonist considers her dilemma: "Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time!" (Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper"). She stops hiding her sickness, and when her husband sees her, he faints, a role usually left to women, she then creeps over him. She is no longer trapped by her role as wife. Gilman eventually left her husband as well, escaping from her domestic role.

As mentioned above, Gilman sent her story to Weir Mitchell, and while mainly protesting his rest cure, she was also protesting against the characterization of women in his own fictional novels. "S. Weir Mitchell enjoyed during his lifetime almost as wide an acclaim for his work as a physician as for his writing. The hand that produced hundreds of scientific medical treatises was no less prolific in this other imaginative area, as Mitchell viewed it, and he voluminously turned out novels, short fiction, and poetry" (Hitchcock). But these popular novels were flawed, in a way.

COAL MINER
BY CASS GORDON
MIXED MEDIA

VISUAL ARTS
SELECTION OF MERIT

THE BRIGHT SIDE
BY MITCHIE TAYLOR | DIGITAL MEDIA

VISUAL ARTS SELECTION OF MERIT

They often contained a male doctor (modeled after Mitchell) and a passive and dependent female patient (Golden). Sometimes, at the beginning of one of Mitchell's stories, a female character will start out as a strong-willed, intelligent woman, but over the course of the story, she gets mentally ill, the doctor helps her, and by the end, she emerges passive and dependent on a male figure, such as a husband (Golden).

Gilman's stories do quite the opposite. For example, in "The Yellow Wallpaper," she creates a scenario with a male doctor and a female patient, but in her story, the woman starts out as almost passive and obedient to her husband/physician, and in the end casts that away (rips away the wallpaper) and creeps over him. Sending "The Yellow Wallpaper" to Mitchell was a rebuttal of both Mitchell's rest cure and literary work, which is all the more important as Mitchell himself treated Gilman and probably hoped that she'd be subdued, just as the female characters in his stories were. However, Gilman rejected Mitchell's treatment and spoke against his writings when she sent him her story, as she wrote (violating the rules of the rest cure) "The Yellow Wallpaper."

"The Yellow Wallpaper" presents the reader with two primary themes – the theme of mental illness and the inappropriate treatment called the rest cure, but also the theme of women's trapped place in a domestic role in society, especially in Gilman's day and age. Both themes reflect the experiences of Gilman herself, and in sending her story to Weir Mitchell, she rebutted both his rest cure and his literature. The issues she wrote about are still relevant today, but perhaps what is even more interesting is the fact that they tie in to each other and complement each other nicely. Both themes present imprisonment in one's own life, symbolized and immortalized by the yellow wallpaper. "The Yellow Wallpaper" is an altered telling of Gilman's life story and reflects the imprisonment she felt inside her own life. Gilman was trapped with her depression, unable to escape, especially when she was treated by the rest cure. She was also trapped as a wife and was expected to play a domestic role. There was yellow wallpaper all around her, but in the end, she tore it away and freed herself. Finding work and formally leaving her husband, she freed herself from the prison depicted in her own fictional autobiography, "The Yellow Wallpaper."

Gilman passed away almost ninety years ago now, but although she was just one person with one life, her experiences and her short story remain relevant today. Neil Watson and Fiona C. Moreton suggest that "The Yellow Wallpaper" was relevant in the age of the COVID-19 pandemic

due to its themes of isolation that many people might have dealt with in quarantine (Watson and Moreton). Mental illness is also an important problem that we need to deal with today, and Gilman's short story can help illustrate that treatments are not always appropriate, and that sometimes it can be best to "ask how someone is doing, looking beyond symptoms and signs at the person behind the disease" (Watson and Moreton). Additionally, women's equality is still an issue today. Such issues as appropriate responses to mental health problems and equal and appropriate treatment of women are not solved quickly or easily. The issues Gilman wrote of 134 years ago are still relevant today, and her short story that reflected her own struggles can help us to understand those issues in order to better resolve them.

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AI DRAGON POT
BY CASS GORDON | CERAMIC

VISUAL ARTS SELECTION OF MERIT

SECOND PLACE ESSAY

ANNA BELLE FAVRE

SUPPORTING WOMEN THROUGH POETRY: AN ANALYSIS OF HOZIER'S "SWAN UPON LEDA"

BY ANNA BELLE FAVRE

SECOND PLACE ESSAY

INTRODUCTION

Women's rights to make their own decisions about their own bodies is a nature-given gift. However, due to recent politics, these rights are being taken away. The disheartening state of the world for women today translates into poetry through the lyrics of Andrew Hozier-Byrne's song "Swan Upon Leda." He effectively uses allusion, figurative language, diction, and symbolism to convey the importance of women's rights. Irish songwriter Hozier wrote this piece with the intention of supporting women and connects ancient tales to modern issues with his 2022 song "Swan Upon Leda." The ancient Greek story about Zeus, a powerful male figure, raping Leda, a mortal woman, is an important symbol of the issues with rape we are currently facing. This song was a political standpoint about reproductive rights, sexual abuse, and religion in politics. The lyricist beautifully connects modern day-issues with ancient stories to make a statement about how women are treated today.

On October 7, 2022, the day the song was released, Hozier posted to social media a message explaining his intentions in writing and releasing this song: to support women. He encouraged people to donate and support groups that defend women and reproductive rights, including abortion. Abortion rights are important because, like Zeus and Leda in this tale, there are large numbers of rape victims who have been impregnated against their will, and they wish to be rid of the child. Rape is a very real, very common issue, not only in society today, but also throughout history.

ALLUSION

Allusion is first used within the title of the song. This title, as well as the entire first verse, refers to W. B. Yeats "Leda and the Swan" (Yeats): a poem based on the Greek myth about Zeus, the supreme god of the Greek Pantheon, and Leda, the Queen of Sparta, who were notably both married to their respective counterparts ("Leda in Greek Mythology"). In this story, Zeus admired Leda's beauty and wanted it for himself, so he disguised himself as a swan and raped Leda while her husband was away. The encounter led to a pregnancy bearing two children who would eventually start the Trojan War. Hozier references the poem in order to connect the theme of women being

used as objects and mastered by men to this song as well as to introduce the circumstance of unwanted or unplanned pregnancy. This Greek story has been a lesson to the world for thousands of years, so Hozier's choice to connect this piece to that story helps to solidify the validity of his statement. This allusion connects this piece to the poem through the raw and hurting feelings they both carry.

In addition, allusion is used within the chorus of the song in the lines "would never belong to angels / had never belonged to men" (Hozier 9-10). In these lines, he is referring to women's rights to make choices over their own bodies. He alludes to both religion, specifically Christianity, and politics, specifically the legislation of Roe v. Wade, which was overturned immediately before the release of this song. The word "angels" is connected to Christianity, and his stating that the angels don't have that control of women and their children suggests that he disagrees with people who believe their religion gives them the right to have control over the decisions women make about their own bodies. On the other hand, the line "had never belonged to men" (Hozier 10) explains that men, as well as these "angels," don't have the right to control women, and they never had it. The honesty in his opinion of these two lines as he alludes to religion and politics is raw and very earnest, further pushing the message of this song.

The second verse also uses allusion to set a dark and bleak tone for the piece in the lines, "the god child soldier Setanta stood dead" (Hozier 14). This is an allusion to an Irish legend about a boy warrior known for his death in battle ("How Setanta became Cuchulainn"). Setanta fought until the bitter end, and then he tied himself up so that he would die still standing. This allusion to the Irish story connects the themes of battle, children, and death despite fighting as hard as you can to the meaning of this piece: the fight for women's rights. Women are forced to fight for their rights, similar to Setanta being forced to fight in the war. Although they gave their best efforts, Setanta and thousands of women alike died in their respective battles. Since abortion is illegal in so many places around the world, women are dying every day because they are forced to carry a pregnancy that they are not capable of, or because they cannot afford to feed and take care of both a child and themselves.

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

The first chorus contains the line: "the swan upon Leda / empire upon Jerusalem" (Hozier 11-12). The metaphor connects the ancient Greek myth about Zeus raping the queen of Sparta to the high, strict, and forceful standards of Christianity. This means that although a woman may not be Christian, they still feel pressure from that "empire upon Jerusalem" (Hozier 12) and Christian followers to keep the child, similar to the force that women are faced within the circumstance of rape.

The simile in the second verse "our graceful turner of heads weaves through the checkpoints like a needle and thread," (Hozier 16-17) compares the "grandmother smuggling meds," (Hozier 14) through the streets of Ireland to weaving with needle and thread. He does this because sewing and weaving are known in society to be "women's work," so although she is fighting for her freedom, she is expected to keep doing her societal chores. These "checkpoints'' are a reference to the border control checkpoints between the North and South of Ireland in the nineteenth century. Since before the Good Friday Agreement, abortion was criminalized in Northern Ireland (Bowcott); anyone who wanted an abortion would have to smuggle the drugs across the border from the Northern side. This simile draws a connection between criminal activity due to no other choice and the standards that society holds women to pertaining to household chores, further encapsulating the theme of the song.

DICTION

In the first verse, the line, "[a] crying child pushes a child into the night" (Hozier 2) uses the word "child" twice to create a haunting and uncomfortable picture. The idea of a child giving birth is unnerving to most, so this quickly establishes the tone of this piece in order to introduce his rhetorical reasoning for women's reproductive rights. In this situation, clearly, the pregnancy was not planned, and most likely was a result of rape, considering the girl's young age. This statement at the very beginning of the song immediately paints a picture of the necessity for the right to abortion.

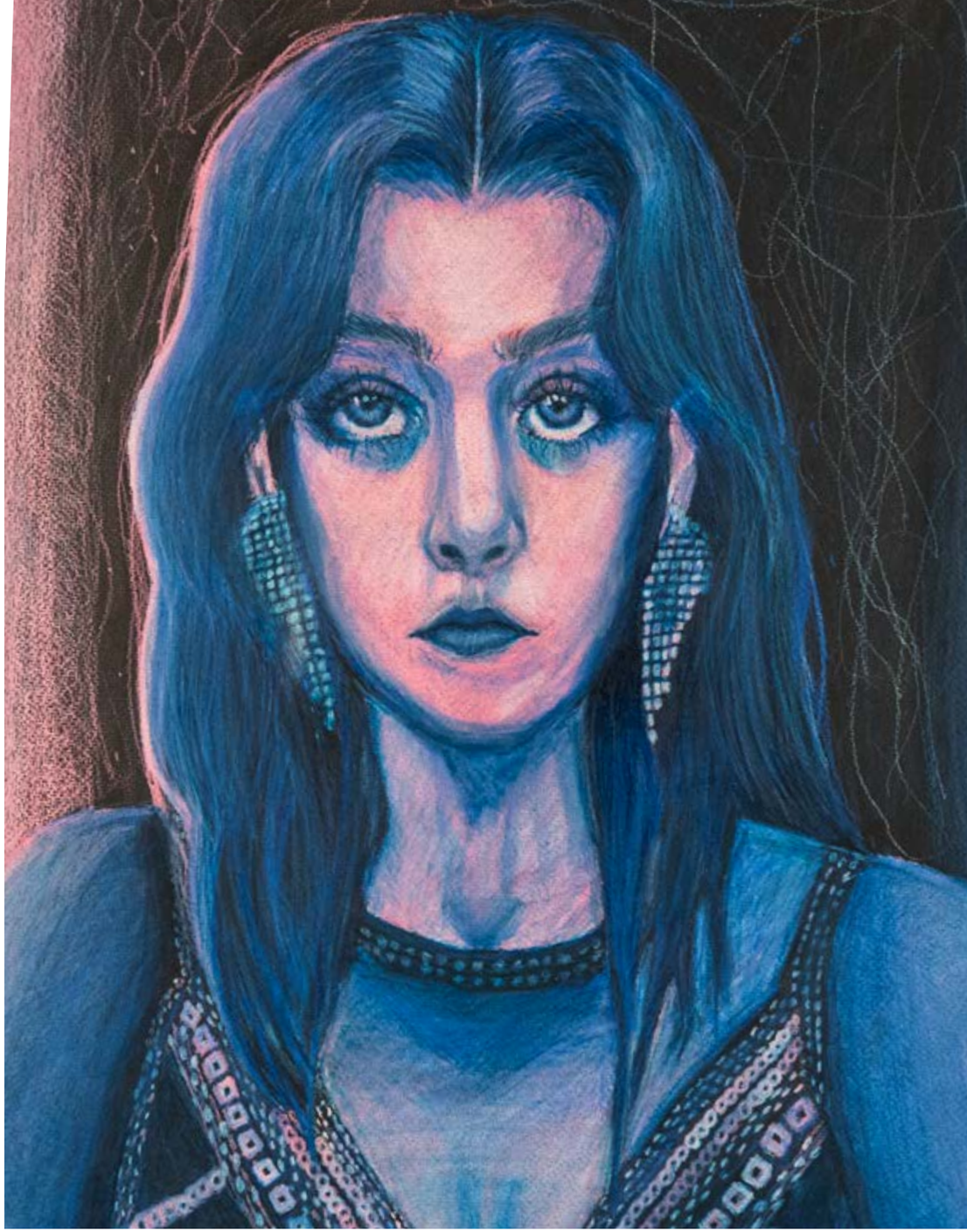
In the first chorus, Hozier writes, "[t]he swan upon Leda / [e]mpire upon Jerusalem'' (Hozier 11-12) and in the second chorus: "[t]he swan upon Leda / [o]ccupier upon ancient land" (Hozier 23-24). The word "upon'' in both instances is essential to the theme of male dominance in this piece. "Upon" creates an image of a higher class or power looming over a woman. This word can show how, most commonly, rape is a man controlling and

domineering a woman. If Zeus as the swan was overtop of Leda, she would be pinned down and unable to move or get away, allowing him complete control over her. In the context of the line “[e]mpire upon Jerusalem '' (Hozier 12), the word “upon” demonstrates the dominance that religion, specifically Christianity, has over the world today. What could be just a regular town is now a worldwide symbol of Christianity due to their god’s son living and dying there. Much like the town of Jerusalem, politics have also been permeated by religion as well. Since several popular religions, most notably Christianity, believe that abortion is a sin, it has become a law in many places to ban it, despite it being a basic human right. In the second chorus, the line, “[o]ccupier upon ancient land” (Hozier 24) continues the theme of government, and it introduces the idea that the “ancient land” with its own lifetime of stories and lessons is being ruled by a single person or a small group of people leads to oppression. Since older, white males run most governments, they do not share the experience of unwanted pregnancy as well as sexism, so they are likely to overlook the consequences in laws relating to those issues. These dominating pictures created by the word “upon'' are honest and grim, like the stance Hozier takes on the necessity for reproductive rights.

SYMBOLISM

In the first verse, Hozier chooses to express the story of Leda's rape and resulting children, because Zeus takes the form of a swan before abusing Leda for her body. The swan is an important symbol because swans are large, powerful birds who naturally pull the attention of anyone around. The swan boldly symbolizes men as a whole. The stubborn and strong bird overcoming and taking advantage of the human girl symbolizes the domination men have over women within society. The swan creates a raw, earnest tone in its blunt symbolism of man.

In the second verse, "the god child soldier Setanta stood dead" (Hozier 14) is a symbol of strength and determination among women. Sentanta is an Irish myth about a famously talented boy soldier who tragically dies in the war at seventeen years old. The remarkable bit of this story is that after he was injured in the battle, Setanta bound his feet to the ground and tied himself up so that he would die still standing (“How Setanta became Cuchulainn”). Since he died in battle, it was an honorable death, and the fact that he was determined to stay standing for his last breaths showed his strength. His story now represents honor, strength, and respect in Irish culture today. In "Swan Upon Leda," Hozier uses Setanta to symbolize the strength and resilience of women today in their fight for



ANALOGOUS DUALITY SELF-PORTRAIT
BY ALLISON MCGARVIE | COLORED PENCIL

VISUAL ARTS SELECTION OF MERIT

reproductive freedom, and show that although some die in battle, the war for reproductive rights rages on. The upsetting picture of a child pushed to be a soldier and dying in a war further establishes the urgency of this issue.

This verse later mentions a grandmother "smuggling meds'' and "weav[ing] through checkpoints." The grandmother represents underestimation of what women can do. Since this character is old and female, people pay less attention to her, meaning she can fly under the radar. The border security is not likely to be suspicious of a little old lady, and she takes advantage of this in order to break the law to get what she needs. This is a representative example of how women are overlooked by society today, but the current movement will get them what they need: rights. This symbol is a sincere and empowering addition to the song.

A few lines later, in the second chorus, Hozier mentions “the gun in a trembling hand” (Hozier 20). This hand symbolizes fear and necessity and circles back to the idea of a child soldier. Painting an image of a fearful person with a dangerous weapon symbolizes the apprehension women experience dealing with the battle for reproductive rights. The gun being a violent destructive weapon can serve as a symbol for the illegal abortions women perform out of necessity. Although they are scared, and may not want to perform the action, they may have to because of health reasons, financial issues, living situations, or simply not wanting children. At-home abortions, or abortions performed by uncertified persons or with questionable drugs, are extremely dangerous for all the people involved. As for the “trembling hand” (Hozier 20), this can represent the hesitance and fear that surrounds the topic of abortion as a whole. The present circumstances make it an uneasy topic to address, let alone fight for. Another view of this “trembling hand” (Hozier 20) is the worry and suspicion about not only receiving an abortion but also even going into a women’s health clinic for a checkup. The state of the world today provides a distressing environment for women to simply exist, and Hozier effectively uses symbolism to convey its importance in this piece.

CONCLUSION

Andrew Hozier-Bryne effectively uses literary strategies such as allusion, figurative language, diction and symbolism to connect the lyrics of the song, “Swan Upon Leda,” to the movement that women should have all the rights to their own bodies. He also connects themes of resilience, childhood, strength, religion, feminism, and rape culture into the lyrics of this piece. The impending issues surrounding women’s rights worldwide are the reason Andrew Hozier-Byrne chose to write his 2022 song, “Swan Upon Leda.” His support in women’s rights and art highlighting the issues of rape, unwanted pregnancy, and religion in politics makes this piece revolutionary and unique.

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TACIT LIFE
BY REID STOYAN | CHARCOAL

VISUAL ARTS SELECTION OF MERIT

DENIAL'S DEATH
BY ISABELLA DOMINISSINI

ESSAY SELECTION OF MERIT

I steadily walked in through the carved, wooden doors to behold a sea of black attire in a luminous, golden cathedral. The only colorful object within my heavy gaze was a stained-glass mural of Jesus Christ, whose eyes seemed to fixate on mine while he hung from the cross at the front of the hall. Everything about the church was immense: the light streaming through the glass windows burned my tearless eyes. I had been awake since four o'clock in the morning, my thoughts bouncing around in my mind until their echoes gave way to painful headaches. My sleep had been irregular since I heard the shocking news of my Papa's death. After his initial hospitalization, the medical staff deemed that his week spent in their care had benefited his condition and that he was en route to recovery. I even got to see him on his eighty-eighth birthday, the day before his discharge date, eating pieces of four-berry pie to the sound of his effervescent laughter from the jokes he crafted. Thirteen days later, he was readmitted to a hospital bed that was later renamed to "death bed".

These numbers and sounds became a record player in my dizzy mind as I walked up the aisles of mahogany pews. My parents led me to numerous relatives, introducing me to some, while others I easily recognized on my own.

"I'm so sorry for your loss sweetie; losing a relative has got to take a toll on your emotional health that's for sure," my aunt Sandra gushed. I continued to look anywhere around the cathedral except into her eyes.

"Oh, I remember when I lost my grandfather. I think I was about your age, and I could never stop crying. I'm sure you are in the same boat. Just do a few hours' worth of cleaning and you'll be too distracted to feel those pesky emotional pains." I nodded and looked into my aunt's eyes for a moment.

"I'm sure it was quite a difficult time for you," I responded, trying to contain the sarcasm that threatened to spill into my tone.

At this point, I was about halfway through the swarms of relatives in their suffocating, black outfits and almost to the second row of mahogany pews. I could see the sign, and I read the words at a slower-than-usual pace as I approached. Family Members Only was printed in bright red, with

a matching velvet rope closing off the pews. My dad made his way over to the velvet rope and opened it to allow my younger sister and me to sit down together. I felt out of place in the sea of adults, and I longed for someone my age to talk with for a moment or two. While my parents continued to mingle with relatives and exchange small-talk updates, I looked over at my sister Sophia to see if she wanted to talk while we waited. Unfortunately for me, she was too busy crying and taking turns hugging my younger cousins to notice.

It felt like the universe was trying to silence me just before the start of the service, and I felt lonelier than ever. Every time I tried to summon that feeling of loneliness, the emotion vanished. I tried to get my eyes to water. I wanted to feel something, anything, to shake the paralyzing shock off my body. Still, nothing was getting through to my brain. My mind was a numb, blank slate, and the emotions kept sliding right off the edge. Just as my focus began to distort while staring downwards at my dark boots, two gentle hands positioned behind my shoulders dragged my attention back into the present.

"Hi Bella, would you mind if I sit next to you?" I recognized the familiar tone as my older cousin Marissa's. Turning my head to the right, I nodded as she let go of me and walked around to the entrance of the pew. Moments later, she sat down next to me, fixating her focus only on my condition.

"I really hope you are doing alright; you have been quieter than usual, and you didn't even come to find me for a hug!" she gently chuckled and reached over to give me one. The tension in my body began to subside, converting the paralysis into a gradual sensation. Looking over her shoulder, I saw that my parents were heading to their places in the front pew, and the other attending guests were making their way in crowds to their pew seating.

"I heard that you are starting middle school this year; is that true?" she asked, releasing me from the hug.

"Yes, I guess I'm kind of excited, but it's middle school, so I'm not really anticipating anything special," I replied as I watched my uncle hand a tissue box to my aunt Sandra, who had mascara running down from the corner of her eye.

The bronze clock near the front of the room chimed 11:00, and each sound seemed to gradually hush the crowd until silence swept over every conversation. The priest, dressed in a robe that was completely white, came into view at the very front of the cathedral. Candles and their matching candelabras sat on either side of the golden eucharist that the priest placed in the middle of the white display. Hymns were sung for a period, and bible verses were read aloud and explained as the mourning crowd followed along to the best of their ability. I reached out to hold Marissa's hand because of the unfamiliarity that was brought about by the funeral mass. Her hand accepted mine and gave it a slight squeeze. Soon, my two aunts and my dad were called to the front to speak if they wished and to say their final goodbyes in front of the crowd. It grew painful to hear their tones, filled with heart-wrenching sadness that confirmed to the audience that their dad was no longer in their world. My dad said brief words, but for the first time in my life, I witnessed a few tears fall from his eyes as he left the podium platform.

The priest grabbed the incense thurible and started waving it around on the platform, using its long, golden chain to slowly rock the heavy object back and forth. The smoke wavered in ghostly streams around the stage, its complex and woody aroma filling my senses. The service ended, and everyone gently stood up to finish their conversations and to offer further condolences to the mourning immediate family.

"Isabella, Sophia, please come with me to the front for a moment; we are going to speak with your Nonna," my mom called to my sister and me as she neared the second pew.

My weeping sister slowly stood, and I said a quick goodbye to Marissa as I stood up and followed my mom to the front-row pew. Suddenly, my stomach sank as I realized that I was going to talk with my Nonna, who had just lost her husband of sixty years. How was I going to even look her in the eyes? Before I could answer my internal question, she was in front of me. Tears still freshly weaving their path through the creases on her face suddenly caused my numb body to intensely tingle with feeling. My burning eyes were relieved by the warmth of salty tears streaming down my face, the painful headache from earlier in the morning subsiding completely.

"Oh, Sweetheart I'm so sorry," her voice cracked as she brought me into a deep hug. "He was a good man; he will go to a good place in Heaven."

"Nonna, I never got to tell him how much I loved him before he passed," I said through the tears that were dribbling into my mouth. "I thought I would have plenty of time with him, and I didn't want to think of a time that he wouldn't be there. I believed that those times wouldn't pass that quickly, and now, they are completely gone," I wept as my voice became raspy.

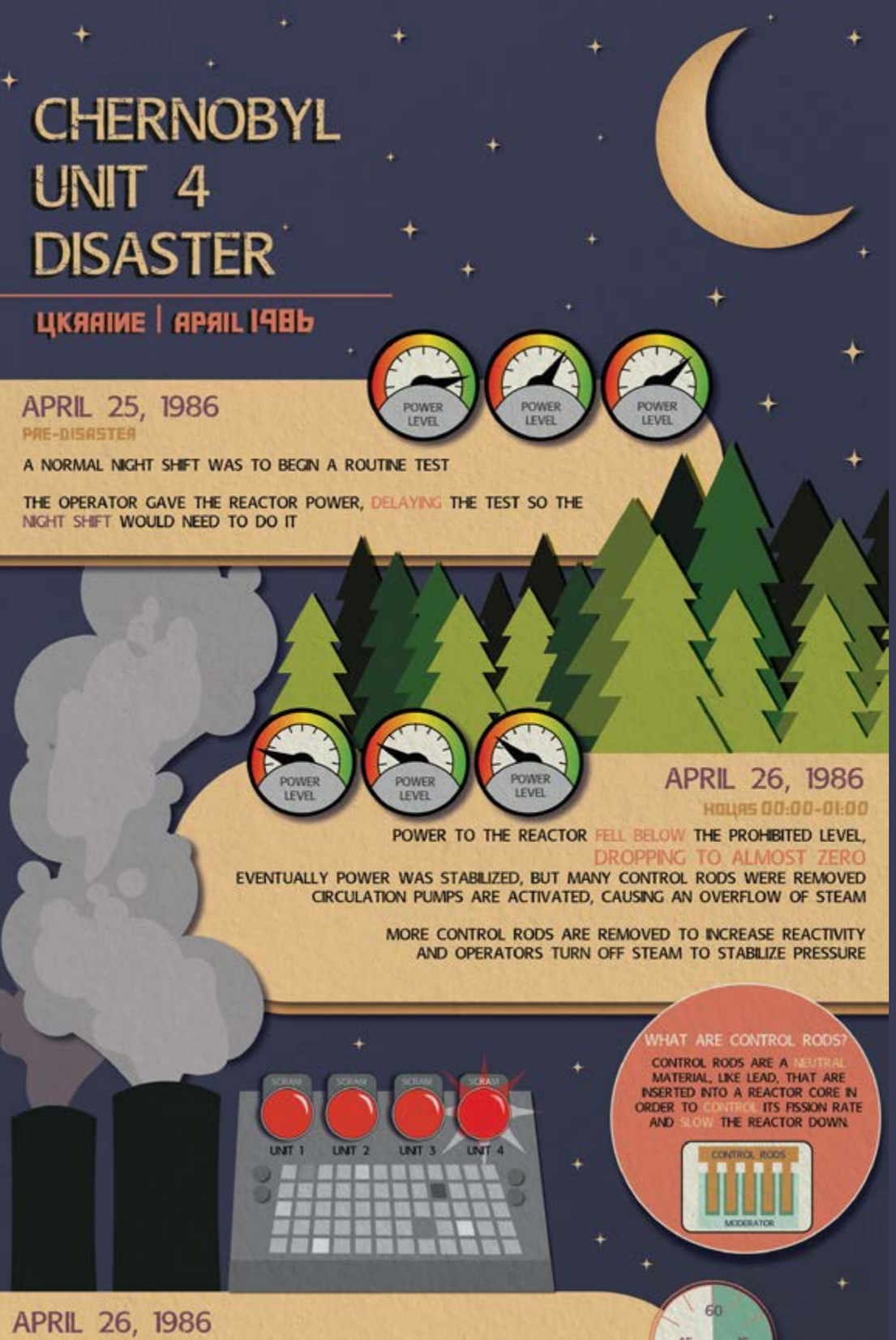
STRAWBERRY LANE
BY ALINA POPLAWSKI | DIGITAL MEDIA

VISUAL ARTS SELECTION OF MERIT

"I know, time always seems to speed up when we want it to slow down. Every person has a time and place in the world, and we only get to spend so much of it with them. He already knew that you loved him; there is no need to feel guilty about what you did and didn't say to him," my Nonna said, releasing me from her hug and grabbing a nearby tissue.

I sat down on the pew nearby while I collected myself. Dabbing my eyes with a damp tissue, I looked over to the baptism pool that was directly next to me. The water was gracefully flowing down from a spout as it fell into the in-ground tiled pool. Each drop of water seemed to pause for a moment, and I recognized how I might never see that exact moment again. As I continued watching the water, I was able to see another paused moment, and then another. Each moment meant something different to me. Each piece of collected time aged me just a little bit. I knew that my Papa's life was a moment in my life, but it wouldn't be the end of my good memories.

When I left behind the mahogany pews, the bright golden room, and the seafoam green baptism pool, I knew that I would be leaving them behind in their entirety at that unfamiliar church. Yet, I also knew that I would remember the look of the surroundings that were inside that church. It wasn't like my memory of those objects would be forgotten. I remembered previous experiences in order to be able to experience more, rather than having to be stuck in one memory permanently. That day, the only thing that I had left behind in that church was my denial. I left it there to die while the stained-glass mural of Jesus Christ watched over it carefully.



CHERNOBYL DISASTER INFOGRAPHIC

BY ZOE PALMATEER | DIGITAL + ACCOMPANYING ANIMATION

VISUAL ARTS SELECTION OF MERIT

Left: *Detail*
Right: *Full Infographic*

SCAN THE QR CODE TO VIEW THE ANIMATION

SHORT STORIES

FIRST PLACE

RICHARD COLWELL AWARD

SHORT STORY

ALDO GARCIA-PAJARO

AIRPORT WINTER

BY ALDO GARCIA-PAJARO

RICHARD COLWELL AWARD • FIRST PLACE SHORT STORY

It wasn't like there was anything wrong with the engine or that there was an alert for hazardous weather. It was not even that he'd boarded the airplane on an empty stomach and would be subjected to its lousy, stale food, though he did find himself craving breaded steak around this time of year. What felt wrong about it all was that Ernesto was once again away from his family. Instead, he was stuck next to Ron on a long-delayed Australian flight, waiting for takeoff and quickly losing patience in an argument that was growing a bit too heated for the air conditioning to extinguish.

"I think you're gonna have to trade me for the window seat," said Ron for the third or fourth time.

"But you said you needed this one?" asked Ernesto, pointing to the one closest to the aisle. "So you could get to the, erm, plumbing facilities faster."

Ron sighed as if the answer was obvious. "You're lucky we were still able to board. Security made us get rid of that suitcase, and I didn't get to eat anything."

Ah, yes, the suitcase. Aware of his troubles with the English language, Ernesto knew it was a different thing to understand subtext. "Then you will not be causing us any turbulence?" he joked; however, Ron was not alone in the night's adversity. "I had to leave the gifts for my kids inside in a rush," he reminded him.

"Just be glad we'll touch down before New Year's," Ron responded as the two men swapped seating assignments.

It was funny, really. Ernesto had accepted the position at an engineering firm incorporated in the grand U.S. of A. to give Lynette and the little ones a better life than they ever could have had in Nuevo Léon, but this left them farther apart than they'd anticipated. Even with the transborder U-Haul truck carrying everyone's homely possessions from northern Mexico to the Great Lakes region, fatherhood had taken a backseat and let the American Dream take the wheel. He could not help but linger in the past, in those days unencumbered by sporadic, overseas odysseys, when

it wasn't so hard to make it to holidays on time. He listed the reasons he had made the choice to migrate in the first place: the congested traffic and bustling crime, Tío Alejandro who'd secretly stolen his car yet would refuse to acknowledge the catastrophe at family gatherings, the arid climate—all of the typical push factors that a hopeful immigrant would take into consideration. It was funny, really, though life shouldn't have felt like a joke. These long trips had been eating away at Ernesto, leaving a trail of crumbs back to his Michigan apartment, where his wife and children were waiting.

"Do you think it's snowing there yet?" he said.

"Huh?" Ron said back in a daze.

Ernesto paused, realizing it was like a second job to clarify nearly everything for his colleague. "The Thumb area. We were so excited for the snow this year." Checking his watch and mentally calculating the time difference, he added, "They are likely about to start dinner."

"Mm." Ron didn't exactly have a way with words, not when it came to what actually mattered. "Yeah, probably."

Ernesto took a look at the man whom he'd spent the last two weeks with. Sure, both their tickets were covered by the company budget. Meals and hotel accommodations were paid for as well, but there persisted a real cost to it all. The boy at the back of his mind—the youngest of his five siblings who were in constant fights for what little they had in Durango—didn't mean to be ungrateful. No, he had simply taken something else for granted. A message from the cabin crew in a Strayan accent blared over the speakers; it was the last chance to disembark. Grabbing the bag that had been occupying the seat between him and Ron, he stood up.

"You can have whichever seat you would like now," Ernesto said.

"What? Are you—"

"Yes. This flight will take many hours, but I do hope you have a safe one."

Among a flock of reasons not to unboard, all delivered as formally and calmly as somebody like Ron could manage, Ernesto only considered one. He and his family could have reunited before *el Año Nuevo*, though it would not have been the same.

Walking off the plane, deactivating airplane mode and dialing Lynette's phone number felt so dramatic. It wasn't like him. That's what he had told himself one prolonged flight after another to avoid causing the type of scene he was used to watching on in-flight entertainment, wherein movie stars raced against odds to catch their true love before boarding. Real life didn't work out so easily. Ten years ago, a younger version of himself would never have been caught dead acting in such a way, but as a father, spending crucial *festividades* separated from his loved ones was no way of living.

"Mi amor?" came a heartening response from the other end of the line, and from reading Ernesto's face, any stranger wandering the airport could comprehend the substance of their conversation.

"You have no idea how much I have wanted to hear your voice," he replied. "But I honestly hope you do not get mad at me."

"Mad? Why? Oh, it's not like you abandoned your wife and three children on Christmas Break," she teased, which brought a weak smile to her husband's face. "I do want to see you soon. We all do."

Echoes of laughter could be heard in the background, building up as the kids realized that *Papá* was on the phone. All sorts of questions came buzzing in, less heavy than the 'why' from moments prior.

"Do the boomerangs really come back when you throw them?" shouted Etienne. His voice and everyone else's were easy to recognize, in spite of so much time apart.

"Did you see any kangaroos? How many did you see, Dad?" asked Miguel.

"He wasn't out hunting animals, stupid!" yelled Selena. "Dad was in Sydney in a suit and tie doing the kind of mathematics with numbers you can't even count to yet."

Ernesto laughed. There was nothing more to do than laugh and see his reflection in the airport windows. Bright lights blinked and shined on the runway, beyond the glass holding him back from hugging them so direly. He looked even further at the city lit up in the distance, picturing a room in a nice house where they sat around a fire together.

"Are you almost home?" Selena stretched out the 'O' in that last word almost like she was doing it to ache her father's heart on purpose, but at least she saw their new place caked in snow as a home, a permanence to return to. "And isn't it 4:00 in the morning over there, Daddy? How are you awake?"

"Hey, how did you do that math in your head? You are crazy smart, *princesa!*"

"No, that is a good question, Amor," Lynette chimed in. "Tell me there isn't a bad forecast. Is the plane not supposed to take off yet?"

"Eh, well, it is. It's just…" Ernesto trailed off. He was supposed to give a good reason and he had one, but a lump formed in his throat and explaining everything aloud suddenly became difficult. It was easier, he surmised, to start with Ron's nasty sandwiches. "That bozo lugged them around in one of his suitcases from the hotel doors and through the parking lot, and tried bringing them onboard. *O sea*, what a cheapskate! How did he not charge it to his company card? That is why we both have one! I had figured he forgot to shower or something, so when the security guards got suspicious—"

A roar of laughter erupted. He tried to continue talking and finish the story, but the more details he gave, the harder it felt to breathe, in a good way. This was the kind of pain in your abdomen that burned with each giggle you let out, the kind of confusion that nobody truly wanted to clear up because the nonsense of it was so funny. Ernesto had kept his frustration at bay for such a long time that he never stopped to think about its ridiculous origins.

"But…yeah. I felt dishonest, like I was keeping something—like I have been keeping myself—from my own family," a silence reemerged. "I could no longer tolerate sitting next to him in place of you, so now I'm here, at the gate again. Along the way, I bought some souvenirs for each of you guys. I may or may not have panicked and thrown them in with the moldy sandwiches at some point."

"Ay, Papi, you should not have done that," said Lynette to Ernesto's surprise.

"One of the guys had a taser ready so—"

She blurted out another comforting laugh before saying, "*Por favor,* I mean leaving your seat empty. For one, you gave Ron the satisfaction of having the whole aisle to himself, although I do wish you gave him a headache with no aspirin onboard too. Secondly, your boss—" but Ernesto interrupted.

"No, yeah, I have no clue what Paul will say to this," he admitted. "Good thing is, I am technically on vacation already for the next few weeks,"

and so the details were left alone thereafter. An awkwardness made its way into the air despite the countless miles separating them. Sure enough, another happy little question popped up.

"*Papá?*" said Etienne.

"*Sí, mijo?*"

"Can you turn on your camera? Mami, you should turn on yours too so he can see the steak we helped cook."

STILL LIFE IN CONTÉ
BY HAILEY MILLER | CONTÉ CRAYON

VISUAL ARTS SELECTION OF MERIT

SECOND PLACE SHORT STORY

ANNA BELLE FAVRE

AUGUSTA

BY ANNA BELLE FAVRE

SECOND PLACE SHORT STORY

Friday morning, Augusta got ready for work at the library in the same routine she did every day. Wake up, shower, dress, pack, eat, leave. She gave her pets a squeeze goodbye and walked to work.

She sat in her tomb of books to do the same job she does every day. Check the books in, and out, in, and out, in, and out again. The beep of the barcode reader broke the silence with a screech that drilled into her brain. When she got up to refill her morning coffee, she glanced out the window to see a group of about ten people standing outside of the courthouse across the street. They were all in church clothes, except for one woman in a white dress. It wasn't a flashy wedding gown, but a simple white dress that hit just below the knee and cinched in lace around the waist. Her manicured fingers, adorned with new rings, held a small bouquet and a lifetime of dreams. She beamed at her new family before they all lined up to take photos of her big day. Augusta melted at the sight of the small ceremony and how happy the family seemed. The woman in white pulled in her groom for a kiss, both radiant with the light of new love.

Augusta saw these weddings almost every Friday, and they were the best part of her week. Her heart swooned at the happy couples, and she appreciated the intimacy of a small, quick, inexpensive courthouse wedding. As the hopeless romantic she was, she had always dreamed of a big, glamorous, royal, fairytale wedding. She would wear a gown made with enough tule to look like a pastry and shimmer with dancing diamonds. Everything would be silver, crisp, and elegant. Her groom would be a handsome prince who treated her like a queen. Now that she was older and more mature, she knew that the real world didn't work that way. A wedding seemed so far out of reach from her sanctuary of solitude.

The sweetness of these ceremonies always touched her, but they also made her feel a pang of loneliness and emptiness. She lived alone with no one to keep her company except for her cat, dog, and romance novels. When she was at work, she got to see people but only had surface level conversations with the patrons. She longed for connection, someone to confide in, someone to know her like the couples in the stories. She was a loving person and had given herself away to relationships in the past only to have it given back. She wondered what she was doing wrong. How could she meet the one for her?

She devoured book after book about falling in love with the perfect man and living happy lives together, but she never found this perfect man. To be fair, she hadn't been looking. The heroines of the stories made it all look so easy, but Augusta found that just wasn't true.

As the wedding party began to disperse and they each drove away, Augusta decided she needed to put herself out there. She was going to find her Prince Charming and have her fairytale wedding with a happily-ever-after.

That weekend, Augusta spent her time talking to friends and asking for advice. Several of them had suggestions, but her best friend Betty, a self-proclaimed matchmaker, had a lineup of men ready to go. Betty was just as determined for Augusta to find love as Augusta herself.

It was easier for Augusta to say she was ready to explore dating again than it was to actually do it. She spent the whole afternoon before the first date worried about what could go wrong. What if he was crazy? What if he was rude? Even worse, what if she actually liked him? Her stomach churned at the thought of opening back up to vulnerability. She leafed through every cheesy romance novel on her shelf, dissecting every possible outcome of the dates in her stories.

Her first suitor was named James. He was a coworker of Betty's, and Betty was confident they would be a good match. Augusta paced with anxiety for an hour before the date. He picked Augusta up five minutes early, which she took as a good sign. He was tall and broad, with a scruffy unkempt beard. He wore a simple blue sweater with a tweed blazer with the chain of a pocket watch dangled into view. The whole way to the restaurant, he talked about his work, his past, and his wonderings. Over dinner, she was able to relax enough to take a few bites of her soup, but she was still so nervous. He talked enough that she didn't have to really be involved in the conversation, just the occasional "mhmmm" and "oh I see" was enough to fuel his stories to continue. By the end of the date, her ears felt tired from hours of his droning on. He was perfectly nice, but when they finally reached her front door, she slipped into the house before he could start another story. In that moment, she remembered just how exhausting dating is.

She called Betty and told her maybe she'd changed her mind. Maybe she was better off alone. Of course, Betty had already made it her personal mission to find Augusta a husband. She figured that being the matchmaker would earn her the title of Maid of Honor, and she wanted that fancy dress and big bouquet.

The next day after work, Augusta heard a knock on the door. She grimaced as she closed her book, pushed her cat off of her lap, and walked to answer it in her pajamas. Much to her surprise, she found a stout man in a navy-blue suit. He didn't appear to have worn a suit very often, based on this one being two sizes too small, his disheveled hair, and the scuffed-up work boots that appeared inches below the hemline of his trousers. He blushed when he realized he was not expected and cleared his throat before explaining that Betty had sent him there to take Augusta on a date. Augusta was horrified that Betty would send a surprise like this after she had said she was done dating. Even worse, she looked like she had just rolled out of bed, and it was only six o'clock. It would be rude to turn him away, so she invited him inside, praying he wouldn't notice the clutter her house accumulated after months without company. She gestured towards the couch and told him to get acquainted with the cat while she got changed.

She practically ran down the hall, cursing as she tripped over a toy the dog had left out. Augusta slammed her door shut and immediately dialed Betty to speak her mind. She squawked to no avail as the call went to voicemail. She knew that the polite thing to do would be to go on this date. He went to all the trouble of getting ready and driving there, the least she could do was to accompany him. With a sigh, she quickly squeezed into a wrinkled, silky emerald dress she found balled up on the floor after the last date. Worried about him being uncomfortable alone in her living room, she knew she didn't have time to primp. She painted a thin line of eyeliner, found her favorite lipstick, clipped her rebellious hair up, and ran out to properly greet him. As Augusta took the first step into the living room, she remembered she didn't grab her purse. When she whipped back around to run and grab it, something caught her eye. A giant, peach colored blob. A man shaped blob. She did a double take, and the man who was unfortunately poured into a suit just minutes before was fully naked, lying on her couch. She shrieked and covered her eyes. He made some snide comment about liking what she sees before she promptly kicked him out.

If she thought her dating life was over before, this stunt was the final blow. How could someone do something so disgusting? Did he think she'd sleep with him for the sole fact that he was already undressed? She was no prude, but that was about a hundred steps too far. No amount of books and love stories could have prepared her for that gruesome epiphany.

After the initial shock wore off, she grew angry with Betty. Earlier, she was frustrated with the surprise, but as the evening's events sunk in, she grew a seething, deep anger. She had specifically told Betty she was

done dating, and this is what she got in return. It felt like some sort of cruel joke. She felt a twinge of hurt under all her rage as she bid their friendship goodbye in her mind.

A few weeks went by. Augusta ignored Betty's calls and let herself be enveloped by the monotony of work. One particularly quiet day, a tall, lanky man with glasses came bustling in, shoulders tense and eyes wide as he was overwhelmed by the number of books surrounding him. When he came nearer to the desk, Augusta asked him if he needed any help.

"Actually, yeah. I'm looking for books on wedding planning." He seemed nervous to ask for help, but relaxed when she got up to show him the way. The books he was looking for were on the first floor, so she tried to make conversation while they tramped down the stairs and navigated through the maze of shelves.

"So, you're getting married? I bet your fiancé appreciates you helping plan it out."

He seemed surprised by this, "No, I wish." He exhaled a small laugh, "My sister Inez just got engaged, and she just needed to use my library card. I can tell she's going to be a bridezilla already. She wants the perfect fairytale wedding."

Augusta was embarrassed by her assumption, but he didn't seem offended, so she continued on, "Oh, I know what that's like. My friend Betty was iron-fisted about every detail of her wedding a few years back. I always wanted a big, fancy wedding too, but I'd like to think I wouldn't scream at my best friend about it." She smiled, giggling slightly as she remembered how ridiculous Betty's wedding day was. She then felt a twinge of hurt. She missed her best friend.

He loosened up, immediately understanding that she was someone he could be comfortable with. He laughed, "Hopefully, Inez will be more like you than Betty!"

They suddenly came to a stop when Augusta realized they had walked right past the shelves. She blushed at her mistake and stuttered as she tried to turn back, "Oh, sorry, the books you want are actually back there." She fumbled and awkwardly tried to navigate them the other way, but the mix of his confusion, her embarrassment, and the tiny space between the shelves, she bumped into him. Making a bad moment worse, she continued to squeeze her body past his and practically ran to the correct shelf. She was mortified and hoped he would get his books and she would never have to see him again.

SPRING
BY CASS GORDON | CERAMIC

VISUAL ARTS SELECTION OF MERIT

The man paused a moment, trying to take in the sudden shift in her tone. As she crouched down to find the books on the bottom shelf, she explained the different types of books and asked him what he wanted. He made his selection, and she guided him to check out at the circulation desk before she returned upstairs.

"Thanks for all your help!" he awkwardly shouted after her while she scurried away.

She raised her hand in a half-hearted wave, and stopped at the landing, where there was a window. It was Friday. There was a wedding. This one seemed to be quite an ordeal. About fifty people crowded out the doors of the courthouse, and the happy couple followed. The groom was a beaming bald-headed man, who was notably well dressed in a full tuxedo. His bride was an older woman, probably in her sixties, who looked like she had found a new spark in her life. She wore a sleeveless shimmery silver-white jumpsuit with sky-high heels. Her hair was gracefully tied into a classy updo. Their loved ones surrounded them with hugs, congratulations, and photos.

Augusta felt her heart swell at the group. They were all so happy, and they really made the best out of a courthouse wedding. As she scanned the crowd to take in every detail, the man, book in hand, had climbed up the stairs to see what she was looking at. She was startled by his sudden presence, but relaxed when she saw it was him. He looked out the window and smiled at the small crowd of people celebrating. "That's beautiful. It's so sweet to see this big moment from an outside point of view. They look so happy."

Augusta noticed a warm feeling deep inside of her, like a hug from inside. "It really is a wonderful sight." She explained that she quite frequently saw these celebrations on Fridays, and she liked to get to see the wide variety of people in their happiest moment.

They gazed out the window for a time, and when the moment passed, he said, "Well, thanks again for the help, and tell your friend Betty to stay away from my sister." He smirked, "I don't want her getting any more ideas on how to make this wedding more complicated. My name's Jasper by the way; it was nice talking to you."

She smiled and thanked him, and they went their separate ways. It stuck with Augusta that he had said, "your friend Betty." A few weeks ago, Betty was her best friend, but now, were they friends at all? Her stomach tied in knots as the guilt set in. She felt terrible for ignoring Betty and staying so angry. Betty was only trying to help her.

Augusta called her best friend that night and apologized a million times over. Then, she told the story of the naked stranger in her living room, and they laughed at the obscenity of it all. They talked for a long time, catching up from the weeks they missed out on each other. Augusta told Betty about the man she met at work, and Betty chanted and squealed that they should go on a date. After the phone call, Augusta felt a lot less lonely. It was nice to have her friend back.

A week later, Jasper returned to the library, in need of a book about wedding cakes. His sister had demanded that their mother should make the cake rather than them buying them. Augusta laughed at the absurdity and led the way to the section on baking cakes. They leafed through the pages, commenting on which cakes they liked best.

"I've never baked a thing in my life, and besides pie for Thanksgiving, neither has my poor mom. I'd love to be able to make one of these, but I seriously doubt we could pull it off." He rubbed his temples and rolled his eyes at the silly predicament.

Augusta joked, "How is she going to know you made it? Just buy one, set it on the table, and nobody will have to know. The cake can be your wedding present to her."

"Actually, it's not a bad idea. I know there's a fancy cake store a couple blocks from here. Maybe we need to go have a little taste test, and make sure it's up to our standards," he gave her a small, sarcastic nudge with his elbow.

"I didn't actually mean that," Augusta protested.

"Well, I did. I'm going to check this book out to keep her questions at bay. Then, you're going to go on your lunch break, and we are going to walk to the bakery." His statement had a sudden tone of authority. He usually carried himself in an awkward, passive manner, but he worked up a lot of courage to make this proposal to her.

She was struck by his boldness and felt a fluttering in her stomach where she felt that warmth a week before. She briefly panicked over the fact that she had sworn off dating, but then decided there's no harm. She was simply helping a patron out, after all. She checked his book out and grabbed her coat.

THE WOMAN IN RED
BY MORGAN THOMAS | GOUACHE, PEN, & INK

VISUAL ARTS SELECTION OF MERIT

As they walked out the doors, they were greeted by a small wedding party of a young pregnant couple. Both Augusta and Jasper stopped to watch for a moment. Before they broke the spell of sweet concentration, Augusta noticed that they had both leaned into each other to watch. Their heads had both tilted enough to almost touch. Augusta could feel an electric energy from the closeness. As they walked to the bakery, they talked about the couple and their loved ones and how sweet it all was.

They ate twelve different types of cake in that hour, and both almost regretted their choice of dessert for lunch. Almost. They took their cake judging very seriously, but still found some time to chat. He told about his passion for collecting cards, and she confessed her love for romance novels. After they found their delicious winner, Jasper walked her back to the library. As the sidewalk turned to meet the door, they both noticed something. Flower petals. The wind must have blown them across the street from the bride's bouquet. It felt like some sort of sign to Augusta. Apparently, it felt that way for Jasper as well, because he turned to her, and words spilled out of his mouth before he could talk himself out of it. "Do you have any books on how to ask a pretty girl you just ate way too much cake with out on a date?"

"What?" His jumbled words didn't connect.

"Augusta, I've really enjoyed talking to you, and I wanted to know if you would go on a date with me sometime."

The butterflies in her stomach rose all the way to her throat and she could no longer speak. As much fun as they were having, she didn't want to take the risk. They sat in a panicked silence when Jasper started to backtrack. "Oh my gosh, I'm so sorry. It's too soon. This is only the second time we've ever met and we're tasting wedding cakes, and I asked you out. I am so sorry, I'll just go." He scrambled out of his chair with his face flushed and hastily threw on his coat, managing to get his arm stuck in the sleeve.

As he wrestled with his jacket, Augusta wrestled with her thoughts. Eventually, she replied in a near whisper, "I do want to go out with you; I'm just not sure I'm ready yet."

The world stood still as they locked eyes. Jasper's shoulders relaxed, and a gentle smile replaced the urgency on his face.

"Oh, okay, phew. Take as much time as you need." He scribbled down his number on a napkin, "take this, and if you make a decision, give me a call." The warm smile on his face comforted Augusta, and she nodded as she took the note.

On her walk back to the library, she called Betty. Of course, without letting Augusta even finish the story, Betty had already talked her into going on the date.

Two years later, Jasper took Augusta to that same bakery, and he asked her to marry him over a wedding cake sampler. Full of bliss and buttercream, she said yes, and her fairytale ending felt like it was finally coming true.

As they began their walk back, he explained, “I know you have always dreamed of a big, fairytale wedding, like the ones in your stories, so I’ve been saving up to make that dream come true. I can’t afford to do everything on the list, but I promise to make this wedding as amazing as I can.”

“Actually,” she considered, “I don’t need a big wedding. I think I would be just as happy with a small group of the ones we love most. When I’m with you, I have all the fancy, fairytale stories I need. I don’t think we need all the stress of a huge, expensive wedding. I just want to skip to the happy part. Let’s get married in the courthouse.”

And so they did.

Augusta wore a simple, silk dress that hit at about her ankle, with silvery flats peeking out and shimmering like liquid moonlight. Her mom had helped her carefully braid her hair into an elegant bun. She felt beautiful, and she felt loved.

Jasper wore a slim, gray suit with one of the bowties he adored so much. Augusta’s heart melted when she saw him. He looked so good, but best of all, he looked like her Jasper. He didn’t need a tuxedo or a classy tie to impress her.

The wedding party and guests were fittingly dressed as well. The maid of honor, Betty, wore a frilly yellow dress and carried a bouquet as wide around as she was. She was sure to tell every attendee, and even the judge, that she had encouraged their relationship from the beginning. The best man was Augusta’s poodle, who sported a classy tuxedo bandana, and was overjoyed to be there. Both Augusta and Jasper's parents attended, and they were happy to see each other, since they had become friends over the years. A small handful of their friends had also come to support their big day, and Augusta was so grateful for all of it.

When the ceremony was over, they went outside to take pictures, and Jasper and Augusta held hands as they looked across the road, into the window that they had looked out at that couple years ago. On the other side of the glass, in the spot she used to watch from, stood a few of her coworkers and favorite patrons cheering her on.

A FEW OF MY FAVORITE THINGS
BY HAILEY MILLER | PEN & INK

VISUAL ARTS SELECTION OF MERIT

THE STAIN ON THE WALL

SHELBY SHIREY

THIRD PLACE SHORT STORY

My mother always tells me I let things bother me too much. She tells me to think back to the root of my problems. Layer by layer, ring by ring. Peeling them back as the layers sting in my eyes. There it stands, in the living room, seven feet tall.

It looked at me kindly. Its fleshy chest heaved up and down softly. It opened its hinges with a gentle creak. My sister had entered. She had walked past me and up the stairs to her bedroom. The air is thick in my lungs, an oily film in my mouth. I walk up the stairs to tell her:

"It's the front door; we have no control over it," I tell her.

Her eyes were glassy, she understood the nonsense that was spilling from my lips.

"It has been good lately; don't worry about it." But she wasn't interested.

She had her book in her hand; it was some kind of murder mystery. She would always tell me the details of gore, and I would usually sleep with the lights on but never admit it. I was afraid the front door would fail me.

"But all of the time it hasn't been good, what about all of that?" I started to snap at her. I had grown impatient.

"I don't like to think about the past. All I care about is right now." She still wasn't interested in what I had to say. She wanted to read her book.

"It opened its hinges and stained the house though." I had made my point well enough and returned to the door. It looked at me. It was beautiful. I wished it had known it had done wrong.

"You made a mess. The whole house is stained." It didn't say anything back. Its chest heaved up and down looking at me with innocent eyes.

"I can't stay here any longer because you failed me too many times. It's all I can think about."

The door remained unresponsive. I left the following week; I had a new door now. It was one that I could control. It remained closed most of the time.

"I like you; you're good to me." That night someone else's door had failed them close by. I appreciated the resilience of the door even more. Everything was seemingly perfect to me.

The days grew slower, and the door held up. I realized suddenly it was what I had let inside was failing me. I had to leave. I was back at my original door. Although it had done nothing wrong recently, I couldn't seem to forgive it. I had to tell my sister what had happened. Why I came crawling to the door I resented so much. This time she had a new book, another murder mystery novel.

"What was it this time?" she asked me. She was still uninterested in what I had to say.

"This time it was what I had let inside with myself." I had piqued her interest. She put her book down although I didn't have much more to say.

"What else had happened?" She loved to gossip.

"Nothing more really, I had just decided it was best." I decided I had said enough. Nothing there felt like my mine. Being a stranger in your own home wasn't any better than having a front door with a bad history.

"Just because I'm back doesn't mean I adore you." Its chest heaved up and down as I stared back at the same innocent eyes as before. It still didn't have very much to say. I went back to my bedroom where everything had been left as was. I couldn't take it anymore. It was stained with the past. I scanned my room up and down. There was no floor, no ceiling. Picking bits and pieces up then putting them back down, I had no idea where anything goes.

"What are you doing? You've made a mess." My sister told me. Everything was all over. I couldn't pick them up and put them back down anymore. I painted the walls the following day. Something still wasn't right.

"It's all wrong. I just can't seem to get rid of it," I sighed at my sister. She'd already started a new murder mystery novel. I wondered who took her. She can't drive. It was just the two of us.

"You're too picky. Just take what you're given," she says. That one stung, but I knew she was right. I left her room and entered mine. The freshly saturated walls are coated in drunk tank pink. I left. I couldn't go back.

There I was back at the door. This time it was hung neatly on a wall where it lay dormant. A door that was sickly blue. It had the same fleshy chest and innocent eyes. My front door, hanging untouched. Left without the opportunity for its chest to heave and its hinges to let out a creak. A mere ghost of a door that stood in front of me, stripped of all of its privileges. The door wasn't real though. It was a mere fantasy, confined by four posts. I had to leave. I had better things waiting for me. The same front door, the one I resented. I entered the door although this time its fleshy pink chest wasn't heaving. There were no eyes to stare back. It still stood there unresponsive, and the hinges let out the same creak. The creak was a sigh of release. My sister ran out of murder mystery novels.

"The door is just a door, but it is still the root of everything," I told my sister. Her bedroom walls were packed to the brim with heavy brass picture frames. Her room was almost suffocating. The air was oppressive although she was happy. She had removed the stain. I reminded myself once more. It was just a front door.

I AM FALLING APART
BY ALINA POPLAWSKI | DIGITAL MEDIA

VISUAL ARTS SELECTION OF MERIT

STAIRWAY BY THE WATER
BY HAILEY MILLER | PEN, INK, & CHARCOAL

SELECTION OF MERIT

THREE GOOD KNOCKS
BY EMILEE ELLIOTT

SHORT STORY SELECTION OF MERIT

The mid-morning sun was growing unseasonably warm, and I used my sleeve to wipe my brow. Crisp, golden hues of red, orange, and yellow had overtaken my lawn, courtesy of my giant maple trees. I was doing my best to rake them into a collected pile. As quaint as the massive trees were, no one warned me that fallen leaves endlessly multiplied; no amount of raking would keep them tidy.

Ozzie, my only roommate, my loveable but irritable Dashaud, rested on the patio, warming himself in the sun. His long body was stretched out lazily as he soaked up our Indian summer.

"You're being a reeeeal help," I called out to him. He didn't even bother to raise his head, although his soft brown ears twitched in acknowledgment.

I checked my phone- ten minutes past eleven, meaning I had another twenty minutes to spend on this dreaded chore. I was trying to wrap this up on my lunch break, before Mrs. Mayberry came home from Bingo. She was a very sweet elderly women and made killer chocolate chip cookies but was overly fastidious about her yard and her award-winning hydrangeas.

Quite frankly, she was overly fastidious about everything. Everything had to be picture perfect, including her neighbors. I had the great misfortune of living to the right of her, and she was always finding ways to make "suggestions" about my lawn upkeep. I found it was best to avoid her at all costs, hence my frantically raking at 11 am.

As much as I complained, she did have gorgeous hydrangeas. I could admire that after all; I had such a brown thumb, and I couldn't comprehend how she got hers to be so stout and tall, the thick blooms so vibrant in color. It had to be something in the soil.

"We really need to buy a leaf blower," I muttered out loud. Ozzie didn't acknowledge this either, trusting I'd make the mental note to browse Amazon when we went back inside. He had a lot of faith; it was either that or he simply didn't care. I chose to believe the first option. I went back to haphazardly raking and stuffing into the brown paper bags; the quicker this was over with the quicker I could go back to my Excel reports.

I heard the gravel in the driveway and my stomach dropped. I whipped my head around—sure enough, Mrs. Mayberry was backing into her driveway. Bingo must have ended early. Ugh. I quickly debated if I had enough time to toss the rake and make a break for my door, but before I could pull the trigger on that, she popped out of her car.

"Oh, thank HEAVENS. I was wondering when you'd get around to this. You know they just blow right over into my yard."

I gritted my teeth into a fake smile.

"Hi Mrs. Mayberry. How did Bingo go?"

She puttered over. Her normally tight kept bun was escaping a bit, leaving her white hair flying. She was thin woman, tiny in every way, and kept her appearance as meticulously maintained as her yard.

Today appeared to be a very different story. Her blouse was untucked slightly from her black shirt and had smears of a reddish stain on the bottom of it. It was heavily wrinkled. She waved her hand dismissively at me— her nails were broken as well. I chose to not comment on any of this; it wasn't my business. I had learned long ago to not ask questions. It would just lengthen the conversation and give her more chances to insult me.

I started to back towards Ozzie, who had decided to sit up. He let out a low growl, which was very unlike him. I saw my opportunity to escape having to hear about Bingo gossip, and I took ahold of it. Nothing quite drives me like getting to avoid human interaction.

"Well Ozzie here is looking to get back in, must be getting a bit warm, so I'll chat with you la-"

"Bingo was going fine until Janet, you know Janet? She lives a few blocks over? At the atrocious yellow house. She also has a problem with keeping her sidewalk edged. You both need to get a gardener. Honestly, it takes five minutes and just gives such a cleaner look."

Her warbly voice wobbled as she came closer. Ozzie let out another growl, standing up now. What perfect timing for him to decide to participate in the day.

"Anyways, Janet got a bit uppity, but I put her back in her place," she stated, smoothing her rumpled shirt down carefully. Her hands left more smears down it, and I raised my eyebrows.

"Oh goodness me. I'm sorry. I'm a bit frazzled."

She smiled at me wanly, trying to tuck her loosened hair back behind her ears.

I nodded, and slowly kept backing up to Ozzie, leaning the rake against the house.

"Well, I'm sorry; my lunch break is over. I gotta get back to it!"

I tried once again to leave. She fluttered her hands, her pale blue eyes piercing into me. Right at that moment, she dropped her purse, spilling its contents across her drive. Coins, candies, pens and seed packets went strewing down the slanted driveway. The wind blew slightly, pushing some a good distance.

"Oh, oh!" she cried, her thin hand fluttering to her heart.

Something was off; she was never this out of sorts.

I sighed, torn. On the one hand, this presented a great opportunity to book it back inside, dog in arm, with my pride somewhat intact, or doing the right thing and helping her gather her belongings. Morals won. As frustrating as she was, she was still someone in need of help. She was clearly not having a good day.

I hopped over the small fence that separated my yard from hers and took the purse from her and started gathering her things.

"You're too good to me. your mother would be very proud!" She patted my shoulder. "I'm just a bit tired. Bingo is getting to be a bit out of hand for a homebody like me. You understand that right? Because you work from home and all. Sometimes some people just strike a real nerve; they're just in everyone's business."

I nodded complicitly with her, the irony of her statement not escaping me — scooping up the last of her contents and handing her the purse back.

"Yeah, I am sorry Janet gave you a hard time, but I really got to get back. My boss is a real pill about breaks..."

She cut me off again, waving her hand around. There was something caked under her broken nails. Nails that she had just gotten manicured the week prior. It was the same day she caught me weeding my front bed on my break. This lady had a knack for catching me.

"Just let me run in and get you the cookies I made last night. They were originally to bribe you into raking your leaves so that they'd stop being such a troublesome eyesore, but since you woke up this morning and had the sense to do it yourself, I suppose they can be just thank you cookies. For helping this old lady."

She grinned, and it was then I noticed her lipstick was smeared. Maybe she was starting to lose it. It happens at this age I told myself. I smiled back, choosing to ignore her leaf comment,

"Ok, that sounds great. Thank you."

She beamed and scurried towards her back door.

I looked back over at Ozzie, who was still standing in a defensive manner at our own back door, his growl low.

"Just a few more minutes buddy!" He pattered his paws at the door and yelped, as if to tell me to hurry up. I shrugged. "She's got that effect on everyone I guess."

I turned back around when something caught my eye from her car. I took a few steps forward. She drove an immaculate white Impala. There was a strange stain across the back of her leather seats. I peered closer, yes there was something oozing all over her back seats.

Like a train wreck, I couldn't' pull myself away. Ozzie started barking louder, more insistently, as if to call my attention back but I just couldn't. I slowly cracked her car door. An immense smell wafted into my nose and wound its way deep into my soul; it was so atrocious – I gagged. Rotten pennies. Blood. It was blood. Everywhere. Her leather seats weren't just specked or stained - it was drenched, oozing down from the seats, puddling on the floors where- oh God. Oh my god.

My eyes roamed over the mangled corpse that was shoved and stuffed haphazardly. Tuffs of white hair, her arms were at an unnatural angle, covered in large scrapes and cuts. Her legs were a mess of tangled limbs, also oozing but the worst was her head. Broken teeth, more blood oozing out of her mouth which was agape.

One eye was dangling, handing from a very thin cord from her socket. Her skull appeared to have been beaten in, as skull and brain fragments pushed themselves out. I slammed the car door shut in horror. That was a real-life body. Oh my God. My limbs felt frozen.

"Oh dear, I was hoping you wouldn't be nosy. See, this is just what I was talking about. People get nosy and must be put in their place. I am running out of room for hydrangeas!"

My stomach dropped as Mrs. Mayberry's voice softly, seemly out of nowhere appeared from my right, behind me. Ozzie was barking even louder, and I could hear him pawing at the back door. I flung my hands up as I turned around. I didn't get my last words out. As I turned around, Mrs. Mayberry flung the bat at me. I felt it connect once with the side of my face—the shock and force of it stunned me and dropped me to the ground. I then felt the second one connect. How was she this strong? This was the same lady that couldn't bend over thirty seconds ago. By the third knock, everything faded to black.

ICHOR MOON

BY EVELYN SCARBROUGH | DIGITAL MEDIA

VISUAL ARTS SELECTION OF MERIT